

LIVING HOPE: Ready When It's Hard

Introduction

We've been walking through 1 Peter together, and one of the things I love about preaching through books of the Bible is that we don't get to skip the difficult passages. We let God's Word set the agenda, trusting that the Holy Spirit knows exactly what His Church needs to hear.

Peter has been building a foundation for the Christian life. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been given a living hope. That hope isn't only about heaven one day—it changes how we live today.

We've seen that living hope shapes our identity before it shapes our behavior. It calls us to holiness in a culture of compromise. It transforms how we relate to government, our workplaces, our families, and one another.

Last week Peter painted a beautiful picture of the Church. We are to be like-minded, compassionate, humble people who refuse to repay evil for evil but instead bless others. When Christ changes our hearts, He changes the way we treat people.

But today's passage raises the question Peter knows every believer will eventually ask.

What happens when living like Jesus makes life harder instead of easier?

What happens when integrity costs you an opportunity? When your convictions cost you a friendship? When obedience creates tension instead of comfort?

Most of us assume faithfulness should make life easier. We expect obedience to be rewarded and doing the right thing to produce comfortable circumstances.

But anyone who has followed Jesus for long enough knows that isn't always how the Christian life works.

Sometimes honesty costs you the promotion. Sometimes faithfulness makes you the outsider. Sometimes obedience brings opposition instead of applause.

Peter knew that personally. He had been arrested, threatened, and would eventually give his life for Christ. Now, writing to believers scattered throughout Asia Minor, he prepares them—not to fear suffering, but to remain faithful when it comes.

Peter doesn't promise a pain-free life. He offers something far better.

Our hope has never been found in comfortable circumstances. Our hope has always been found in a victorious Savior.

That's the heartbeat of this passage.

Big Idea: Living hope doesn't remove suffering—it prepares us to remain faithful through it.

Church, we need that reminder today.

We live in a culture that equates blessing with comfort, but Peter reminds us that the faithful life is often the costly life. Even then, we are never alone. Jesus suffered. Jesus rose again. Jesus now reigns at the Father's right hand.

Whatever we face, we never face it alone.

Let's hear God's Word together.

1 Peter 3:13–22

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Historical & Literary Context

Peter isn't changing subjects. He's bringing together everything he's been teaching throughout this letter.

These believers had been born again into a living hope through Christ's resurrection. They had been called to holiness, integrity, humility, and love. Now Peter answers the question every believer eventually asks:

What happens when faithfulness becomes costly?

The Christians receiving this letter were scattered throughout Asia Minor, living as a minority in an increasingly hostile culture. Many had already experienced rejection, slander, and social pressure because of their faith.

Peter isn't writing to people wondering whether suffering might come.

He's writing to people already feeling its weight. His goal isn't to answer every question about suffering. His goal is to teach believers how to remain faithful through it.

Before he gives practical instruction, he reminds them of something they cannot afford to forget:

Their circumstances do not determine their hope. Jesus does.

Christ is risen. Christ is reigning. Christ is building His Church. Because He is victorious, His people can remain faithful. That's just as true for us today.

Most of us won't face imprisonment for following Jesus, but we know what it means to be misunderstood, pressured to compromise, or tempted to stay quiet.

Peter's encouragement is simple: Don't lose heart.

Living hope doesn't remove suffering. It prepares us to remain faithful through it.

Point One: Living Hope Gives Us Courage to Do Good

Peter begins with a surprising question. **"Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?"** (1 Peter 3:13)

At first it almost sounds naïve. After all, don't good people suffer?

Peter isn't denying that reality because in the very next verse he says, **"But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed."**

Peter isn't promising comfortable circumstances. He's making a general observation.

People who pursue goodness usually bless the communities around them. Honest people build trust. Compassionate people strengthen relationships. Peacemakers bring stability.

But we don't live in a perfect world. We live in a fallen one.

Sometimes doing good is met with gratitude. Sometimes it's met with opposition.

Jesus prepared His disciples for this in John 15: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."

The Christian life has never come with a guarantee of comfort. It comes with the promise of Christ's presence. Peter dismantles the assumption that obedience always makes life easier.

Sometimes integrity costs you something. Sometimes faithfulness makes you stand out.

That's why Peter writes, "**Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.**"

Echoing Isaiah 8, Peter reminds believers not to fear what everyone else fears, but to trust the Lord instead.

Fear is powerful. It tempts us to compromise. It persuades us to stay silent. It values acceptance over faithfulness.

But Peter immediately redirects our focus. "**But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.**"

Everything hinges on that sentence. Before we speak for Christ, our hearts must belong to Christ.

Here's the principle: **Whatever sits on the throne of your heart will shape your response to hardship.**

If comfort rules your heart, you'll compromise to keep it. If approval rules your heart, you'll stay silent to protect it. But when Christ rules your heart, faithfulness becomes more important than acceptance.

Peter continues, "**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**"

The Greek word is *apologia*—a thoughtful defense. Peter isn't describing argumentative Christians. He's describing faithful Christians whose lives raise questions.

When people see peace in hardship... When they see forgiveness instead of retaliation... When they see hope instead of despair...

They begin to ask, "Where does that come from?"

Peter says, **Be ready.**

Not because you won an argument. Because your life created the question.

Then Peter tells us how to answer. **"But do this with gentleness and respect."**

The word *prautēs* means strength under control. It was used of Jesus Himself. If gentleness wasn't beneath our Savior, it shouldn't be beneath His followers.

Peter also reminds us to speak with respect because every person bears the image of God—even those who reject our message.

Our tone is part of our testimony.

He continues, **"...keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."**

Peter isn't saying Christians won't be criticized. Jesus was criticized. The apostles were criticized.

He's saying that if people reject us, let it be because of our allegiance to Christ—not because of our arrogance.

Speaking the truth matters. Speaking it with the character of Christ matters just as much.

Peter closes with this challenge: **"For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."**

The world says, "Avoid suffering at all costs."

Peter says, Some things are worth suffering for.

Faithfulness. Holiness. The gospel. Every generation has to choose.

Comfort or Christ. Approval or obedience. Popularity or faithfulness.

If following Jesus costs you something, don't assume you've done something wrong.

Sometimes the cost of faithfulness simply means you're walking the same road your Savior walked before you.

And that's exactly where Peter takes us next.

He points us to the suffering—and ultimate victory—of Jesus Christ.

Point Two: Living Hope Anchors Us in Christ's Victory

Peter now shifts our focus from our suffering to Christ's. **"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."** (1 Peter 3:18)

In one verse Peter gives us the heart of the gospel. Christ suffered.

He isn't asking believers to walk a road He has never walked Himself.

Jesus knows rejection. He knows betrayal. He knows injustice. He knows suffering.

When you suffer for doing what is right, you are following a Savior who has already walked that path.

Peter also says Christ suffered **once** for sins. That single word matters.

Unlike the repeated sacrifices of the Old Testament, Jesus' sacrifice was complete and final.

Nothing needs to be added to the cross. The debt has been paid. The sacrifice has been accepted. The victory has been won.

Peter then summarizes the great exchange: **"The righteous for the unrighteous."**

Jesus took our place. The only truly righteous One died for those who were unrighteous.

Paul says, **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** (2 Corinthians 5:21)

We stand before God, not because of our righteousness, but because of Christ's.

And Peter tells us why Jesus did this. **"...to bring you to God."**

Don't miss that. The goal of the gospel isn't merely forgiveness. It isn't simply escaping judgment. The goal of the gospel is reconciliation with God Himself.

Sin separated us. Jesus came to bring us home.

Christianity is not ultimately about rule-keeping. It is about being restored to relationship with the Father through the Son.

Peter continues, **"He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit."**

The cross was not the end. Three days later Jesus rose from the dead, declaring once and for all that sin and death had been defeated.

Our hope doesn't rest in a dead teacher. Our hope rests in a living Savior.

Peter then takes us into one of the most debated passages in the New Testament—the proclamation to the "spirits in prison."

Faithful Christians have understood these verses in different ways.

Some believe Peter is referring to fallen angels. Others understand the spirits to be the people living in Noah's day. Others see this as Christ proclaiming His victory after His resurrection.

While believers have differed on the details, they have agreed on Peter's main point.

Peter is not inviting us to speculate. He's encouraging suffering Christians with the triumph of Jesus Christ.

Whatever interpretation you hold, the conclusion is the same. **Jesus is victorious.**

The One who suffered now reigns. The One who was rejected has been exalted. The One who appeared defeated has triumphed over every spiritual power opposed to God.

That's Peter's encouragement.

When suffering tempts you to think evil is winning— **Remember Christ.**

When obedience becomes costly— **Remember Christ.**

When you wonder if faithfulness is worth it— **Remember Christ.**

The cross was never the end of the story. The resurrection changed everything. And because Jesus has already secured the ultimate victory, suffering will never have the final word.

Living hope anchors us—not in changing circumstances—but in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Peter has shown us what Christ has done. Now he lifts our eyes to where Christ is today.

Point Three: Living Hope Looks Beyond Today's Suffering

Peter closes this passage by connecting Christ's victory to baptism.

"...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." (1 Peter 3:21)

Peter immediately tells us what he does **not** mean. He is not saying the water itself saves us. Water can cleanse the body. Only Jesus Christ can cleanse the soul.

Baptism is the outward expression of an inward reality. It is the public declaration that we have died with Christ, been raised with Christ, and now belong to Christ.

That's why Peter calls it **"the pledge of a clear conscience toward God."**

Baptism doesn't earn salvation. It celebrates the salvation Christ has already accomplished. Throughout the New Testament, faith and baptism belong together. Not because baptism creates our union with Christ— **It celebrates our union with Christ.**

Peter reminds suffering believers that baptism is ultimately a declaration of identity. When you are baptized, you publicly declare that your life belongs to another kingdom.

Your King is Jesus.

That identity matters when following Christ becomes costly. If my identity is rooted in success, failure will undo me. If it's rooted in other people's approval, criticism will crush me. But if my identity is rooted in Jesus Christ, hardship cannot take away what matters most.

Peter has spent this letter reminding believers who they are: Chosen. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. God's special possession. Recipients of His mercy.

Now he reminds them that baptism points to that new identity.

The world may reject you. But heaven has already claimed you.

Peter finishes by lifting our eyes to Christ's present reign.

Jesus has gone into heaven and now sits at the Father's right hand, **"...with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."**

Peter wants suffering believers to end here. Not looking at their suffering— Looking at their Savior.

Jesus is not hanging on a cross. He is not lying in a tomb. He reigns at the Father's right hand.

Every angel is under His authority. Every ruler is under His authority. Every spiritual power is under His authority.

That would have been incredibly encouraging to believers living under Rome. Caesar looked powerful. Persecution felt overwhelming. But Peter reminds them: Caesar is not on the highest throne.

Jesus is.

The same is true today. Cultures change. Governments rise and fall. The future feels uncertain.

But there has never been a moment when Jesus stopped reigning. He is still building His Church. He is still saving sinners. He is still accomplishing His purposes.

One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That's why we have living hope. Not because suffering disappears.

But because— **Our Savior lives. Our Savior reigns. Our Savior wins.**

Peter began by asking what happens when doing good leads to suffering.

He pointed us to Christ's suffering. Then to Christ's resurrection. Finally, to Christ's throne.

The question now becomes: **What difference should Christ's victory make in the way we live tomorrow morning?**

The Gospel Changes How We Face Suffering

Peter has taken us on a remarkable journey. He began with our suffering. Then he pointed us to Christ's suffering. Finally, he lifted our eyes to Christ's victory. **That is the gospel.**

Suffering was never part of God's good creation. Sin brought brokenness, death, and separation from God. Every injustice, every loss, every funeral reminds us that this world is not the way it was meant to be.

But God did not leave us there. The Father sent His Son into our broken world. Jesus suffered. He was rejected. He was betrayed. He died on a Roman cross. The righteous One willingly suffered for the unrighteous so that we could be brought back to God.

When Jesus cried, "**It is finished,**" the payment for sin was complete.

Three days later the tomb was empty. Death was defeated. Sin was conquered. Jesus Christ rose in victory. Peter reminds us the story doesn't stop there. Jesus ascended to the Father's right hand, where He reigns today over every authority and every power.

That's why our hope is living. It isn't built on positive thinking. It isn't built on favorable circumstances.

It is built on a living Savior who has already conquered everything that ultimately threatens us.

Think about what that means. The greatest problem we ever faced was our separation from God. Christ solved that forever at the cross. That's why suffering is never the final word.

Jesus is.

If you've never trusted Jesus Christ, this invitation is for you. The Savior who suffered for your sins also rose again for your salvation.

Turn from your sin. Trust His finished work. Be reconciled to God. You don't earn His acceptance. He has already made the way. And if you already belong to Christ, remember this:

Whatever hardship you're carrying today is temporary. Whatever opposition you face cannot overturn Christ's victory.

Your story is not defined by today's suffering. Your story is defined by Christ's resurrection. That's why we have living hope. Not because life is easy— **But because Jesus is alive.**

Challenge

Church, Peter didn't write this passage simply to explain suffering. He wrote it to prepare us for it. So before we leave today, let me ask you four questions.

First, where are you tempted to compromise because following Jesus has become uncomfortable?

Maybe you've stayed silent when you should have spoken. Maybe you've softened your convictions because it seemed easier. Living hope gives us courage to obey—even when obedience is costly.

Second, who is sitting on the throne of your heart?

Peter says, **"In your hearts revere Christ as Lord."** Whatever rules your heart will shape your response to hardship. Is it comfort? Approval? Success? Or is it Christ?

Third, if someone watched the way you respond to hardship, would they see hope?

Peter says people should ask about the hope we have. That means our lives should create questions. When life falls apart... Do people see peace? When we're hurt... Do they see forgiveness? When the future is uncertain... Do they see confidence in Christ? Our greatest witness is often revealed in our hardest moments.

Finally, where are your eyes?

Peter has lifted our eyes throughout this passage— From suffering... To the cross... To the empty tomb... To the throne of heaven.

Don't spend your life staring at your circumstances. Look to your Savior.

Don't measure God's faithfulness by today's hardships. Measure it by an empty tomb. Measure it by an occupied throne.

Jesus is alive. Jesus reigns. Jesus has not abandoned His Church. So don't lose heart. Don't give up. Keep doing good. Keep trusting Christ. Keep following Jesus.

Because **living hope doesn't remove suffering. It prepares us to remain faithful through it.**

INVITATION

Before we leave today, I want to give us an opportunity to respond to what the Holy Spirit may be saying.

*Maybe you're here this morning and you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Peter tells us that Christ suffered once for sins—the righteous for the unrighteous—to bring us to God. That's the invitation of the gospel. Jesus has already done everything necessary to reconcile you to the Father. Today you can turn from your sin, place your faith in Christ, and begin a new life in Him.

*Maybe you're already a follower of Jesus, but fear has become louder than faith. You've compromised. You've grown quiet. You've become discouraged. Today is an opportunity to surrender that fear and once again declare, **"Jesus, You are Lord of my heart."**

*Or maybe you're simply weary. You've tried to remain faithful. You've done the right thing. And instead of being rewarded, you've been misunderstood, overlooked, or hurt. Friend, don't lose heart. Your Father sees you. He knows your faithfulness. He has not forgotten you.

Whatever the Holy Spirit is saying to you today, don't ignore His voice.

- Maybe today you need salvation.
- Maybe you need renewed courage.
- Maybe you simply need someone to stand with you and remind you that you are not walking this road alone.

Whatever your next step is— **Don't leave the same way you came.**
Take your next step toward Jesus.

Trinitarian **BLESSING**

As you go this week, may the Father remind you that His eyes are upon you and that His love for you never changes.

May the Son, who suffered once for sins and now reigns at the Father's right hand, strengthen you to remain faithful in whatever you face.

May the Holy Spirit fill you with courage, peace, gentleness, and living hope, so that through your life others may see the beauty of King Jesus.

Go in His grace. Go in His strength. Go in His living hope. **Amen.**