

Hope is a very necessary commodity for the well being of human life. Hope is believing that things will get better, even though now they don't look too good by the human eye. People are looking for hope in the wrong places. See them lined up in front of the lottery counter paying the poor man's tax. See them traveling to Mayo Clinic to get that Super Doctor that will heal them. See them looking for that job that will give them lasting satisfaction. See them looking for that great spouse who will love them totally. But every one of these looks will disappoint. You don't win the lottery, The Mayo doctor doesn't heal you. The company says you need to retire. The spouse dies.

You want lasting hope. That can be found alone in Jesus Christ. Jesus will never fail you. With Jesus things are going to get better, if not right now, eventually. You can count on Jesus. Yours is a living hope, because it always stays alive, is always there for you, and will never fade away, or diminish or lose its value. Jesus Provides: Real Hope At The End of Your Rope!

What does it mean to be at the end of your rope? It means to be completely worn out, to have no more endurance, or energy left. You are ready to give up completely on life. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes, "I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men. The burden God has laid on humanity is that everything is beautiful, but only its time. The beauty of a flower only lasts for a week. The beauty of a snowfall only lasts so long, and then it melts away. But God has set eternity in the hearts of men, the desire for things to last. WE buy dishwashers, stoves, washer and dryers to last. WE don't like things that break down. But the problem is that everything in this life has a life span. Cars wear out. Florida roofs, need to be replaced. Love goes sour. Computers become obsolete, and even our bodies slow down and grow old. And so Americans who live with the newest and best equipment in the world, still aren't happy and optimistic. Why? Because we have eternity in our hearts. We want something that will last, last forever. But the things of this life are not eternal.

But that's where Jesus comes to the rescue. He gives us something that will last forever. Jesus gives us an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade. He gives us eternal life in heaven. Jesus once said, because I live, you also shall live. Not matter how bad life may get Jesus gives us real hope. In fact, when he rose from the dead, it guaranteed that his Father accepted His sacrifice for our sins. The eternity that yearns in our heart, the desire for something that will last is now a certainty. Likewise, you aren't going to get to heaven and find the floor boards have rotted out, the paint is peeling, and there are holes in the ceiling, none of that. The promised land will still be there. It's not going away. This is what gives us a living hope-an optimism-even about death, because then we know we'll live forever.

Ours is a living hope. The opposite of a living hope is a dead hope. If I put my hope in myself to pay the debt of sin and rise from the dead after I die I have placed my hope in a dead hope. I cannot extract anything from my life that I can use to pay the debt of sin. Let's do a little math lesson to illustrate this point. 2 times 2 is 4. 8 times 8 is 64. 8 times 0 is 0. 1000 times 0 is also 0. When I try to find something in myself to cancel the debt of my sin, I find only zero. Anything I produce in my life only multiplies the debt because what I produce in my life, even in my best moments, is short of God's glory and his perfection.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples the night of his resurrection, he gave them a

living hope. He showed them the nail marks in his hands that were the evidence that sin had been paid for at the cross. When the disciples saw Jesus they were overjoyed to see that Jesus was alive and to see the evidence their debt was paid in full. Think of the joy that is yours each day as you celebrate the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead. Your debt is paid in full through him.

Ask the question, “Are you sure all your sins are forgiven?” and you may hear the answer, “I think so.” That is not a living hope. That is a dead hope. If I base my hope on my performance or my grades, I have no hope. If I base my hope on Christ alone, then I can say, “I know my sin is forgiven through Jesus.” Ours is a living hope, because through Jesus’ resurrection from the dead we have the sure hope of rising from the dead and joining him in the place he has prepared for us. You are born again “into an inheritance that can never, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you.”

And what’s even better is that Peter promises us that we are shielded by God’s power until God calls us home! The devil cannot - I repeat - cannot take your hope away. The only way you can lose it is if YOU let it go. No matter how hard the devil beat on Job, Job didn’t curse God and die. He came close, mind you, but he never did. In the same way, we have a guarantee of eternal life and protection even in this life. God won’t let us be tested beyond what we can bear. This is what gives us hope!

Having this living hope really sustains and helps us during the trials that life brings to us. It was Job who said that man is destined to trouble as the sparks that fly upward.” Just as you cannot have a fire without some sparks flying upward, you cannot have life on this earth without experiencing pain, suffering and sorrow. Peter writes that our living hope is so real we can rejoice in it every day even when we have trials and tribulations. What a blessing it is to have a living hope that we can focus on each day, a hope that fills us with joy so great that we can confidently say with Paul, “The sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing to the glory that will be ours.”

The sufferings of this life have a way of refining our faith and make it shine just as fire refines gold and makes it shine brightly. “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 Christ is revealed.” Gold is now trading above \$1700 an ounce. But it isn’t worth that much as a gold nugget. There are a lot of impurities in the gold nugget. You have to put that nugget through fire at some 1100 degrees Fahrenheit to rid yourself of the impurities. So it is with you faith dear Christian. The sufferings of this present life lead you to trust more confidently in the place that Jesus has prepared for you.

Peter reminded his hearers that grief and trials come so that your faith may be PROVED GENUINE and result in PRAISE, GLORY and HONOR at the revelation of Jesus Christ on Judgment Day. Satan once asked God, “Does Job fear God for nothing?” In other words, “what is it costing him to fear you? Anyone could fear God for riches and popularity. How genuine is that?” Feg Henkel was a member of my congregation. He was diagnosed as having cancer of the esophagus. Initially it hit him pretty hard. He wasn’t able to eat any food the normal way we eat. I remember him saying to me that he sure would like to eat just one 5 guys hamburgers again. Anyway, Feg spent his time doing crossword puzzles, coloring pictures, racing his cars. He spent time reading his Bible, and going thru a study of the entire Scriptures called, “The Story”. He made the most of each day God had given to him. He told me that when Jesus wanted to take him

home, He was ready. He had a spirit that his time was in the Lord's hands. His faith showed itself as genuine in this most difficult time of his life.

The apostle Peter is just like Feg. When Peter and the Christians of his time went through persecution, they looked at it as an OPPORTUNITY to prove to God and the devil that they meant what they said, "I love my Lord." Suffering is an opportunity to show our true colors. Then on Judgment Day - God can say, "look - it's obvious that his faith was more than words. It was genuine!" What an honor that will be! That makes it worth suffering!

This living hope that we have creates in us a longing to see Jesus again face to face in all his glory. "Though you have not seen him, you love him; 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 goal of our faith, the salvation of your souls." There is a goal, an end point, a final chapter in our lives, that we cannot wait to see fulfilled. It is that moment in history when Jesus comes in glory and we will see him face to face, just as Thomas did when he saw the nail marks in the hands of Jesus and knew it was the Lord. We have what Peter calls an "expressible and glorious joy" as we contemplate that shining moment when we see Jesus in all of his glory.

In 1 John 3:2 we are told, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we shall see him as he is." The church fathers affectionately called this "the beatific vision." This is the hope of seeing Jesus face to face again, just as he is. I read a story once about the son of a famous English admiral who became blind. Even though he was blind he was able to meet a beautiful girl. They fell in love and planned to get married. People said, "Too bad he is blind, and cannot see how beautiful she is." Then his father heard about a special surgery that could correct blindness. The young man had the surgery shortly before his wedding day and he could see again. He requested that his future bride not see him until she walked down the aisle on their wedding day. When the music started playing, and he saw his bride for the first time, with the new sight that had been given to him, tears came into his eyes, tears of joy. She was more beautiful than anything he had ever imagined.

We cannot begin to imagine the joy that will be ours when Jesus comes and we see him as he is, face to face. One of the most successful television commercials of all time was the Duracell battery commercial with the "Energizer Bunny" that just keeps going and going and going. People want things to last and not fade away and disappoint us. The hope we have in Jesus and his resurrection is a living hope that goes on forever and ever and ever. Amen.