

Heaven: Hope & Suffering

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0 : 00] The world has a saying, you can never go home again. Maybe you've heard that. You go off to college or you go off somewhere for a long time and you change and you grow and you become a new person.

And then when you come back home, it doesn't feel like home anymore. It feels strange and unfamiliar. Everything is different. It's not the place you belong. So everything that was familiar and comfortable that you associated with home, it doesn't feel that way anymore.

Well, thankfully, for the Christian life, it's the exact opposite. When this present life is over for you, or the Lord comes back, you will finally go home.

So we are strangers, sojourners. Abraham was in the promised land, and yet he didn't consider himself home yet. He was looking forward to a better country.

That was where he was going to. That's us, too. Heaven is our home. And so when we get there, it will be like coming home.

[1 : 14] Our father will be there. Our elder brother will be there. The whole family will be there. And we will do family things. We will eat and drink and laugh and work and worship and relax.

We'll enjoy each other. We will enjoy God forever. When Jesus talked about what he was preparing, he talked about home. He talked about a house, someplace that you belonged.

And so we will be home. We will be where we belong. And everything will be just right for us.

Finally, we will be in a world that matches what's inside of us.

So what we find in our heart will have some correspondence to what is out there in the world. And what is out in the world will find a correspondence in our heart. It will fit perfectly together.

But for now, it's good to remember that we are strangers. Sojourners, sojourners, aliens, travelers. We are as much migrants as all of those migrants that you see in Europe now.

[2 : 25] They're getting in their boats. They're crossing land and ocean in order to find a new home. And I would think that if anyone could understand the feelings motivating them and the hopes that they have, we could because we are like them.

We want to go to someplace better. We want to leave this sorrow behind. We want a new home.

But as we are traveling, and we're sailing in these flimsy ships that are so fragile, and as we go through the valley, we need to keep on remembering, and you need to keep on remembering, that we are traveling for a purpose.

This is not a meandering road trip where the point is to travel. The point is to get somewhere, and we are getting somewhere. Home is waiting. But for now, so we're balancing these two things of we're going home, but we're not home.

We have hope, and we have suffering at the same time. And it can be so hard now. We each have enough grief and sorrow in our life that it's God's way of saying, this isn't home yet.

You're not home yet. Keep going. Well, today I want to talk about suffering and heaven and hope and how those things go together.

[3 : 48] And we're going to be kind of transitioning now. Over the last year, we've been looking at what heaven is like, but now we need to transition to, okay, in light of heaven, what are some of the attitudes?

What are some of the things that I need to do to live now? And so we're going to be talking about suffering and heaven and hope. So if you have your Bibles, turn to 1 Peter 1.

1 Peter 1. And 1 Peter weaves these three braids together into a nice big braid. I don't know if that's how it goes, ladies, but these three strands together into a nice braid.

And so 1 Peter 1, we're going to read verses 3 through 6. Verses 3 through 6. Peter says, 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, 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.

[5 : 13] In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

Now, this afternoon, I just want us to notice three lessons from this passage. Three lessons from this passage. And they're not going to be difficult.

They're not deep down into the text. They're right there on the surface. Three little lessons. The first is that we are a people of hope.

We are a people of hope. What I mean is, we're not only hopeful people, we are people that hope should define us, that should always be with us.

And because of God's grace, it does define us. So maybe you need to remember this, that we are a people of hope. Maybe you are really down. Maybe you are discouraged.

[6 : 15] Maybe you feel like you're almost done. Life has beaten you up. And it feels like one more punch and you're going to be down.

It's difficult. There's no end in sight. Well, maybe you need to remember this, that we are a people of hope. And we're going to talk about what hope is in a little bit, but we have to recognize or realize right off the surface that hope belongs to us.

It's attached to us. It's what in one way defines us. So what does Peter say? We have been born into a living hope. So you are born into this country.

And by being born into the country, you've taken on the identity of an American. You are born into a living hope. So hope is sealed on your birth certificate.

Just like probably the state of Indiana is sealed on your birth certificate. There's some sort of seal, I'm sure, on there that says, this person was born here. Well, our new birth was the beginning of our participation in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 28] Our new birth was the beginning of our participation in the new creation. We have to realize that when Jesus was raised from the dead, he wasn't raised in the same way that Lazarus was raised.

Lazarus was raised and then he died. His resurrection didn't allow him to escape the old creation, this creation. But when Jesus Christ rose, it was a different kind of resurrection.

It was the very first kind of resurrection into the new creation. And what Peter is saying here is that our new birth was the beginning of our, it was just the beginning, it wasn't the end, it was the beginning of our participation in that new creation, the new heavens and the new earth.

So that's who we are. If you're a Christian, this is who you are. You're a new creation, new creature. And so we don't belong to this world. By being born again, you belong to the next.

It's who you are. So we are a people of hope. Peter calls it a living hope. And it's living because Christ is living. It's living because it's as alive as Christ is alive.

[8 : 44] So our hope cannot die because our hope is really wrapped up, condensed down into Jesus Christ. And he has been raised from the dead.

Our Savior cannot die. And it's living for another reason because it's not a dead hope. It's not a dead and gone hope.

It's still out there. It's still in the works. It's alive and well. So you know the difference between those kind of hopes. If you have a live hope, it's still something that you believe in.

It's still possible. It's still out there. You're still striving for it. Well, we are still striving for this one. But a dead hope, the world is full of dead hopes. And dead hopes can be a lot even sadder than burying someone we love.

It can be so hard to bury our dead hope. We wanted to go to this or that school. We wanted to marry this or that person. We wanted to do this or that career.

[9 : 47] We wanted this. We had hopes for these things. We had hopes for children. We had hopes for our children. And yet again and again, those hopes have been stifled. And it hasn't happened.

And so maybe in the process, they've become dead hopes. Dead. We feel them to be dead. Or maybe just dead because they're no longer even possible.

But we have a living hope. Nothing has killed it. Stored up, not where things can destroy it.

Not where rust and moth can destroy it. These break in and steal. It's stored up where we can't lose it. So, he says, it's kept in heaven for you.

It's kept. Who's keeping it? God is keeping this hope. Now, that's good news because if that hope was in my pocket, I could lose that hope.

[10:47] If it was in my hands, I could break that hope. But it's in God's hands. He's keeping heaven. He's got it. He's keeping it for us and he's keeping us for it.

It's in the bank. It's in reserve. It's waiting to be taken out. And so that's who we are. We are a people of hope waiting for our best things. So, whatever might be true here and now, whatever we might be experiencing now, this is who we are.

We are a forward-looking, forward-pointing people. We aren't backward-looking people. The only thing that we need to look to the rear-view mirror is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That is in the rear-view mirror. That is the only thing that is supremely vital and important for our present life where we would say, that is my life.

But that has a pointing to the future as well. That future, the future is where our life is waiting for us. And so we aren't stuck in, you aren't stuck in your histories.

[11:54] You aren't stuck in your upbringings or your old failures. Those things don't define us or identify us. Now we are children of God and we are heirs.

Heirs of a vast fortune, an inheritance. Now think of that. Think of the richest person in the whole world and his inheritance for his children.

Now think of God. He has this inheritance waiting to be given to his children. It doesn't seem like that. It doesn't seem like that right now, does it? Well, let me tell you a true story.

A couple of months ago, if you were to go to a particular school in Seattle, a particular elementary school, at around 8 in the morning, you would have seen what you see in a lot of schools.

Parents driving in with their cars, doors opening up and little kids coming out. Minivans sliding the door open and the kids popping out. And if you were there at that right time and you were looking at the right kind of, just at that right moment, you would have seen a Honda minivan pull up with a mother driving it, like one in a hundred or all the rest, and she'd push the button and the door would slide open and some kids would pop out and run off to school.

[13:19] No one special, nothing unique, nothing to set them apart by the way they look, the way they're acting, but they are the heirs of the \$60 billion Amazon fortune.

Their dad runs Amazon. He's the king of internet sales. They don't look any different than anyone else, but it is a true story.

His wife takes the kids to school every day. They drive a Honda minivan. She picks them up at the end of the day. But their future, at least from the world's perspective, is incredible.

Well, what about you? God says you're heirs of God and co-heirs with Jesus Christ. You have an inheritance, too. That's the family you've been born into.

Thank the Lord. That's the family we've been born into. We are a people of hope. That's who we are. So to be a Christian is to change everything. Now, that's the first thing I want you to remember about you.

[14:28] The first lesson in this passage that you, if you are a Christian, if you are in Christ, you are a child of hope. Your best things are in front of you.

The second lesson, the second thing you need to keep in mind is this. Heaven doesn't take away your present sorrows. Heaven doesn't take away your present sorrows.

It doesn't make it so we don't feel. We don't grieve. We don't have pain. Some people and some Christians say, I shouldn't feel this way.

Or you shouldn't feel this way. You shouldn't be so down. If you believe, you will rise above it. Your hope will be so real that these present sorrows and griefs will fall away.

If you're really believing, then these things will be nothing to you and you won't feel them. Or worse, if you really believe, God will take them all away, all the pain.

[15:29] He doesn't want us to have the, He doesn't want you to deal with those. And so believe them and it will disappear. Well, the truth is we do feel these things.

Sorrow is here. It hurts. And these things are still, still real. So sorrow and hope are next door neighbors. They live side by side.

They're always found together in this world. Look at verse 6. In this you greatly rejoice. You greatly rejoice in this hope of heaven. You greatly rejoice in this inheritance that's yours.

Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. So heirs don't escape sorrow.

to be a child of hope doesn't mean you don't feel anything anymore. You don't suffer grief. So are you suffering grief? Well, don't think that something strange has happened to you.

[16:29] Don't think that you're doing the Christian life wrong. That you have some sort of weak Christian faith. To live here in this world is to suffer.

to be a Christian in this world means you don't belong. And so we're still living in a world dominated by God's curse on sin and that frustration that is bound up in everything.

So hope and heaven don't take away present sufferings. And maybe you say I know all that but let me just say the reason I'm saying this is Peter is not denying your pain.

I know how it feels. I know it hurts and the conflict and the misunderstandings and the decisions that you have to live with from yourself or for others the continual war with sin the sickness the disappointment the death all the things that confront us.

Peter is saying I know it hurts. And I would echo Peter I know it hurts. You can still suffer and have hope. But you notice the other side is true and this is in the third place.

[17:48] Sorrow doesn't take away our hope either. So hope doesn't take away the sorrow and the the reverse is true as well.

Sorrow doesn't take away our hope. Again they're living side by side here. Sorrow and hope hope and sorrow. So heaven is so wonderful we can rejoice in the midst of our suffering.

In the midst of our sorrow. We can rejoice and hurt. We are complicated creatures. And what Peter is saying is those two things live together now.

So all the sorrow in the world can't take away our hope. Whatever happens here cannot take away our hope.

Our hope is still there. It's a stubborn reality. Heaven is the stubborn reality that will not go away for the Christian because it's kept by God.

[18:50] And if God keeps something it's going to stay there. Our feelings may come and go. And this is where we need to make the distinction between the feeling of hope and the objective reality of our hope.

Hopefulness the feelings of hope may come and go. It can wax and wane high tide low tide. The feelings of how real heaven seems to me can go in and out.

But our hope what we are waiting for what is coming our way is an objective reality. It's a certainty regardless of how we feel about it.

Our feelings have no effect on its reality. And so all the sadness and all the sorrow and all my present feelings about things can't change it.

Now I know like children you're tired children it seems like it's taking forever to grow up. Forever to grow up.

[20:02] Doesn't it feel that way sometimes? I'm going to be eight years old for the rest of my life. Now parents you know those feelings aren't true.

You almost wish they were true don't you? But they're not true. No growing up is not a matter of if. Generally it's not a matter of if. It's just a matter of when.

If things go as they normally do every day you are getting older every day you're getting closer to adulthood and one day eight years old will be far far away in your rear view mirror.

So every day kids you're closer than the day you were before. it doesn't always feel that way but it is that way. Sometimes it feels like time has stood still and I am going to be permanently in this situation.

But that feeling isn't true and it's not true in any sense. Growing up is what happens to children. A hundred children out of a hundred children grow up. And that's what I'm saying here that heaven is as sure as that.

[21:15] Do you remember being eight? Now you're not eight anymore. It's as sure as that. And no amount of sorrow and hardship can take it away from us.

And so what Peter is saying is you can rejoice now. And he is saying rejoice. We can rejoice through the sadness. We can rejoice through the weight.

We can rejoice through everything. We can rejoice because it's going to happen. We are going to open the door and we're going to go into our eternal home and we are going to stay there forever.

That is real. That will happen to us. And so where do you find yourself? What grief? What sorrow are you suffering? I'm not saying don't feel that.

I'm saying pull in the rejoicing. rejoice. Your hope is alive and well. Your hope is alive and well.

[22 : 18] You have an inheritance that can never spoil or fade. Everything here spoils and fades. You buy that new leather couch ladies.

and it doesn't really matter what you do. You put it in front of the window and it looks good for a while and then 10, 15 years it's faded.

The leather is faded. The shine is gone. But you are going to a place and heaven is coming to you. Heaven is going to be revealed and it's a place that never loses its shine.

It's the new heavens and the new earth. And we talked about that in two different senses. It's new in the sense of it's not going to be this one anymore.

It's going to be new in the sense that the old is gone and now here's something new. But it's also new in the sense of quality. When you've been to heaven for 10,000 years bright shining as the sun it will be as new and as sparkly as the first day.

[23 : 25] And that's your hope. It's real. It's out there. It can't spoil. It can't fade. God has it. No one can snatch it away. And so you can rejoice.

And so what Peter's word to us and my word to you is in the midst of the trials, in the midst of the hardship, don't forget to take a break from this world. Look up, look out, remember what's in front of you, and rejoice.

This is what your father has in store for you. Let's pray. Let's pray. Heavenly father, we do thank you for your generous heart that would promise us all of these things, even though we have certainly been prodigal sons.

And if not prodigal sons, we've been elder brothers. But you've been a God of grace, a father of mercy to us. You've forgiven us, you've reconciled us by the blood of your one and only son, Jesus, so that we could be with you forever, so that for the countless ages to come, you will show the inexpressible greatness of your kindness for us that is in Jesus Christ.

Please help us to be forward-looking people. people. Don't let this world, don't let our own hearts, don't let the devil put concrete into our shoes and onto our feet so that we go dragging along, always thinking about the failures of the past, but not the grace that is to be given to us when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[25 : 08] Help us to be those hopeful people that you want us to be and that we need to be. So I pray that this week and this afternoon that the joy of the Lord would be our strength.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.