

“The Hope Of Easter”

1 Peter 1:3-9

April 19, 2020

What do you think the future holds for all of us and our nation? If you were to look at our country simply from a technology point of view, you would think that our future is very bright. We are living today with more gadgets than the world has ever known. You would think that with all of these gadgets and inventions that we would be living in an age of optimism and hope. Even with the current pandemic, you would think that our world would be filled with hope. Just think of the diseases that have been conquered in our lifetime; consider how easily we can communicate with people around the world today; and look at all of the comforts we have as we are being told to stay at home. But in the midst of all this, it seems like people are not very optimistic these days. With the coronavirus spreading to more people, with layoffs and unemployment climbing, with people hoarding certain supplies from the grocery store, and seeing a sense of frustration growing from having to work from home or stay at home; it seems that hope and happiness are fading. But Peter, in our second lesson for today, assures us that since Jesus lives, so does hope.

Even before this pandemic started, it already seemed like we were living in an age of doubt and pessimism. Even though we have all of these wonderful gadgets and our lives are rather comfortable, there is a desire in all of us for things to last. We buy cars, dishwashers, refrigerators, and washers & dryers to last, but they fail us and we don't like it when things break down. The problem, though, is that everything in this life is temporary. Cars break and wear out. Gadgets become old. Computers become obsolete. Homes need repairs and renovations. Love in a marriage fades and goes bad. Even our bodies slow down and grow old.

So we, who live with the newest and best equipment in the world, still are not always happy and optimistic. Why? Because the things and dreams of this life are not eternal, they won't last forever. We don't have any kind of guarantee on our health. We don't have a guarantee on wealth. Jobs that may have appeared to be rock solid with big companies that have been in business for years may have disappeared over the last month. Marriage does not always last until death separates a couple. We all know the old saying, “The only sure thing in life is death and taxes.” As a result, many people are pessimistic.

Is that your view of life? Have you grown pessimistic toward work, marriage, or these COVID-19 rules and restrictions, wondering when they will ever end and if we will ever go back to the way things were before this pandemic started? Do you think God wants you to live your life that way? If you have lived or worked with someone who was always pessimistic; then you know it's not fun. Not only is your life miserable, but so is everyone else's around you. But that is not the way God wants us to live. If you live without hope, then one could argue that you may be living without faith. There's no excuse for that kind of outlook on life, but even as Christians, we do it all the time.

Several years ago a pastor friend of mine was going through some tough times, so his wife came into the kitchen one day wearing all black and looking sad. My friend looked at her and asked, “Who died?” She said, “God did.” And he said, “What are you talking about? God did not die.” But his wife responded, “Oh, I thought by the way you were acting that he had.” She wanted to remind him that Jesus was still alive, that there was still hope even in the midst of difficulties. And that's Peter's point in our second lesson for today from 1 Peter 1. Note the sense of optimism in our opening verses. “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.” (1 Peter 1:3-5).

No matter how bad life may get, there is always hope, because we have the assurance that Jesus died for the sins of the world, that Jesus died for us, and that God accepted His sacrifice for our sins. There is more certainty to life than death and taxes – there is eternal life. It's the promise that has given us hope in this world of something that is permanent. Jesus once said, “Because I live, you also will live. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

The great thing about this promise is that it can never perish, spoil, or fade – because it's in heaven. This is what gives us a living hope, a sense of optimism even in the face of death, because we know that we will live forever. And what's even better is that Peter promises us that we are shielded by God's power until God calls

us home, which means there is nothing, there is no one who can take your hope away. The only way you can lose it is if you let it go. When you really live with that hope, it truly does affect the way we live our lives.

My wife, Sue, has been struggling with pain in her knee for several months. Finally she went to see doctor about it and when she came home she was smiling. She showed me an X-ray of her knees that she had taken and said rather joyfully, "I went to the doctor hoping he would find something in my knee and he did! Look! There's no cartilage in my left knee!" Now that sounded a little strange to me at first. Sue was happy the doctor discovered no cartilage in her left knee. But she explained, "Now I know why it has been hurting, there really is something wrong." She wasn't necessarily thrilled when the doctor told her she needed surgery, because there will probably be additional pain in the process, but knowing that the surgery and rehab will strengthen her knee has given her hope that the pain will eventually go away.

The point I'm making is: What do you base your happiness on in your life? Many times people are not happy, because they base their happiness on the temporary things of this world. If they're not happy, then they conclude that God must not love them, because God has the power to make them healthy and wealthy. But God never promised us health, wealth, and a comfortable life.

In the book of Acts, Paul and Silas are put in prison for their faith and telling people about Jesus. During the night they had their feet placed in stocks, which would cause extreme pain and cramps in their legs. But around midnight Paul and Silas were heard singing hymns of praise to God, and Peter tells us in our text that many Christians at this time were doing the same thing while in pain. Peter says in verses 6-9: "In 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 your faith may be proved genuine and 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."

The reason why Peter said they had reason to rejoice is because their suffering would only be temporary. While it may seem long and difficult at the time, nothing could compare to the joy of an eternity in heaven. So when we look at life from this point of view, it helps us to rejoice, because we know that our suffering is only temporary – just like our suffering with this pandemic is only temporary. Peter also reminded his hearers that grief and trials come so that your faith may be proved genuine and would result in praise, glory, and honor at the return of Jesus to this world. When Peter and his fellow Christians went through persecution, they looked at it as an opportunity to prove to God that they really loved Him. Their goal in life was not to be happy right now. Their suffering was not going to hurt their faith, instead it was going to strengthen their faith. How? Because it would make them turn to Jesus for strength and help. So if it would do that, then why not rejoice in it. Just like Sue is looking forward to having surgery on her knee, even though she knows there will be additional temporary pain in order to remove the constant pain she has now, so we can live with hope and happiness even in the midst of suffering, knowing that eternal life with Jesus is coming for all of us who put our faith in Him. Jesus lives, and so does hope.