

“Imperishable and unfading.” 1 Peter 1:3-12

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

This is the last sermon in our Advent midweek series. We have been reflecting on gifts that Jesus brought us. First, we reflected on trust, then on peace and today for our reflections we have - hope.

Peter the apostle is sending this letter to all the Christians scattered across the world. This letter is often described as a letter of hope. Hope... what does this mean? How would you define that word? This is important.

Because what is meant by hope in every day’s language, and what is meant by hope in the Bible, those are two very different things. Paul the apostle writes in his letter to Ephesians: **“Remember that you were [once] separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”** (Eph 2:12)

Paul speaks about those who do not know Jesus. And he says that they have no hope. What does he mean by that? We could ask any person who is not a Christian: “Do you hope for something? What do you hope for?” And I am quite sure that they would answer: “Sure I do hope for many things. I hope for this and that... and so on.” How can Paul be so certain that people without Christ have no hope?

That is where we get to those differences in how we understand what “hope” means. When we casually speak about hope, we may mention something like: “I hope the

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weather on the weekend is not too bad. I hope that you have a safe trip. I hope that I can finally get that job. I hope my children can live happy lives.”

Do you see what is common for all of this? We can call all those hope statements - wishful thinking. We wish that things went that way. Those are our subjective desires and preferences that things would turn out that way. That’s all.

“I hope” in that sense equals “I wish that this came true”. Some of those hopes may be more reasonable, some of them less, but there is no guarantee whatsoever that they will come true. It’s just what we wish for.

When we speak about Biblical hope, that is something entirely different. It is not something that originates in us. That is not something subjective. That is not something uncertain. In the Biblical sense hope refers to something that originates with God, that is grounded on the unshakable foundation of God’s own promise.

There is nothing subjective about it. There is nothing uncertain about it. In the Biblical sense hope refers to the future reality which the Triune God has promised to bring forth and which He will most certainly accomplish according to His plans in His time.

This is why Paul writes that those without Christ have no hope. Nothing certain to look forward to. Even worse, ultimately nothing good to look forward to. What could one hope for without Jesus? For something good in this life? Okay...

But we know that even the best things, and people in this age, they come, we may enjoy them for a little while, and then they are gone, or we are gone. The end. A quick journey from the womb to the grave. Filled with disappointments, pain and sorrow.

That is what Paul was referring to. It is so different for you, Brothers and Sisters. Hear this: **“According to his great mercy, [the Triune God] has caused you to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Yes, this is your hope! Not something that may or may not happen. No! The Triune God has already caused you to be born again to this living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. What exactly is this hope?

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Your inheritance in heaven, in the Kingdom of God, in New Heavens and New Earth. As you have been made children of God, you have also been made heirs of God the Father and coheirs with Jesus Christ. And remember, all authority has been given to Jesus by His Father.

And you as His adopted brothers and sisters are chosen and destined to live and reign together with the Risen Jesus forever. This is your inheritance, you can't lose it, it cannot perish, it is awaiting you and for now you have been sealed with God's own Spirit as a guarantee that you will receive it.

More than that. It is not up to you to make it to the day when you receive this inheritance. No! As Peter puts it, you are being guarded by God's own power through faith for that day. You are being guarded! By God's own power.

Our faith, our trust in the Triune God is not of us, it is God's work in us, it is our Father Himself who keeps sending you His Spirit to guard you for the day of salvation when all your hopes will be fulfilled.

As for now, we are to rejoice in this wonderful hope which is yours in Jesus. Even as for now for a little while, if necessary, we may be grieved by various trials. Why those trials? **"So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."**

See, even trials in this life serve God's good purposes for your eternal life. They serve as testing by fire for your faith. And your faith, and this is remarkable, Peter describes it as more precious than gold tested by fire. For that gold still perishes.

But your faith, this wonderful gift of God, will endure and will deliver for you the fulfilment of all hopes, praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. This is what our Christian hope is about. Unshakable, unperishable, prepared by God, guarded for you by God Himself, awaiting that day.

This is the Good News for you. This is the mystery of God's grace and favor towards you that we just can't comprehend. And that's okay. For it is not only us who struggle with this Good News, in these things, as Peter puts, even angels long to look into.

So, Brothers and Sisters. Rejoice in this hope, in your inheritance that is stored for you, that awaits you, rejoice even if you are being tested, for God the Father uses even your testing to bring you to the day when all your hopes will be fulfilled. Rejoice!

For this is one more incredible gift that our Lord Jesus Christ has brought you. Hope!

Rejoice, indeed!

Amen.