

The Best is Yet to Come • 1 Peter 5:10-14

We all need hope. Hope helps get us through tough times. Hope helps us survive today and live for tomorrow. What do prisoners do when serving a long sentence? They hope for an appeal. They hope for a pardon. They hope for parole. What do we do when we're sick or unemployed or struggling with a difficult relationship? We hope to get better. We hope to get a job. We hope to improve the relationship.

One of the very best parts of Christianity is that it is a religion of hope. Many world religions are all about fear; Christianity is all about hope. God has promised to care for us through the worst this world can deal to us. God gives to us eternal life. The best is always future. The best is always yet to come.

This was an especially important teaching for first century Christians. They were few in number and the severity of the persecution against them was continually growing. Many of them were killed simply because of their commitment to Jesus Christ but their confidence in God was amazing. Martyrdom became a stunning tool for evangelism and recruitment. As pagans saw the dying hope of Jesus' followers many of them wanted what the Christians had and they converted to Jesus Christ.

It's no wonder St. Peter finishes his New Testament book with words of blessing and hope. He has already taught them and encouraged them with 19 powerful principles for success in tough times and now he finishes up with his 20th and last principle—The Best is Yet to Come! He writes in 1 Peter 5:10-14:

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Most hope is circumstantial. If we have an undiagnosed illness we hope that a doctor will be able to figure out what's wrong and that there is a medicine that will heal us. If we have a strained or a broken relationship we hope a counselor will have the key to unlock the difficulties and make things better.

There is nothing wrong with circumstantial hope. It's good when circumstances are positive; but circumstances aren't always positive. The prognosis can be grim. Finances can be bad. Prospects for the future may seem awful; instead of getting better things suddenly may get worse. How do we then have hope?

The best basis for hope is not circumstances but God. As Christians our hope is not rooted in shifting circumstances; it is rooted in God. Let's look at 1 Peter 5:10-11 but give special attention to the starting point:

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Christian hope is not based on good luck, wishful thinking or positive predictions; it is based on God. We believe God is in charge. We believe God is all-powerful. We believe God has obligated himself to Christians and is personally engaged in our lives and our future. Peter writes that "God . . . will himself" do what needs to be done in your life and mine.

This may be something only a Christian can fully understand because only Christians have that level of confidence in God. To others it might look and sound like religious fantasy or self-delusion. In the very worst of circumstances we are convinced

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that God can turn the impossible into the possible, the worst into the best, even death into life. Our faith is not a blind faith in faith itself; our faith is in the great God of the universe.

In the first century it was believed that there were multiple gods who lived on Mount Olympus. They were distant and largely disinterested humans. But now Christianity was teaching that God is personal and directly engaged in our lives. In fact, he is so interested in us that, as Peter says, he is the “*God of all grace.*”

Grace refers to gifts. There is another line in the Bible that says, “*Every good and perfect gift comes from above*”—from God. God is generous; he is determined to give us all the gifts and all the goodness we need. He is determined that our lives will count and that everything will end up good and right.

God has called us to share in his greatness. The Bible says that God has “*called you to his eternal glory in Christ.*” God has staked his own future on Jesus Christ. Jesus will not only triumph over death but he will ultimately triumph over sin and Satan. He will rule the world and all the success in the universe will be displayed in him. Jesus will look very good. And God has called us to share all this with Jesus.

Politicians who run for the highest offices in Washington need lots of help to win and then to do the job. When the majority party changes in the Congress or a new president is elected to the White House a lot changes. The best offices in the Capitol go to the leaders of the majority party. The committee chairs go to the majority party. The majority party gets the power of appointment to the courts and to ambassadorships. They get access to money, invitations to international events, access to the press and they go down in the history books. It’s a big deal!

Often those who support a candidate in the election get appointed to positions if their candidate wins. It is almost as if the candidate says, “Stick with me through the election and then share with me in the benefits of victory.”

God is saying something like this to us although on a larger and eternal scale. Trust him. Believe in him. Follow him. And then share with him in “*the eternal glory in Christ.*” In other words, we get in on Jesus’ ultimate victory.

In God’s case the ultimate victory is a sure thing. Therefore, we have hope that we will win with him. We will share with Jesus. The very, very best is our guaranteed future. Our hope is not in what will happen; our hope is in the God who will make it happen.

The basis of our hope is God and God determines the outcomes of our hope. The first outcome on his list is something we would probably not choose to put there; it is suffering. 1 Peter 5:10 says, “*And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*”

The Bible assumes that some suffering is a normal part of the Christian life. There are some people who interpret the Bible in a selective way that says the Christian life should always be pleasurable and problem-free and that if it is not that way it is because we have deliberately chosen that which is bad and neglected the blessings of God. That is a sad and inappropriate reading of the Bible. The truth is that someone can be faithful to Jesus Christ, do everything right and still suffer.

There are two ways to look at this. Many of us consider life to be hard. It could be a broken relationship, the death of a child, a chronic illness, pain that will not go away or deep disappointment in the failure of a business. And the sad part of it is that you don’t have to be very old to have that written into your story. We all have stories of personal pain.

On the other hand our lives are easier and more prosperous than most of the six billion people in the world today and most people in past history. When we compare with other people in our world we begin to realize that what we consider to be poverty in many cultures is prosperity. Most people don’t have health benefits or cars or houses or education that comes close to what we take for granted. What we consider long life is double the life expectancy of huge segments of the world’s population. Yet, we are notorious for ingratitude and for complaining about what others would consider luxury.

So, do we suffer or don’t we? Yes, we suffer. Life is not easy at best. It is measured by the comparisons of our own generation and our immediate context. We must neither become ungrateful for our good times nor minimize the reality of the pain we suffer.

While visiting the People’s Republic of China I had what might be called a watershed conversation with some Christians I met there. They had been tortured and imprisoned in deplorable conditions for years during China’s Cultural Revolution. When I asked about the suffering they had experienced they told me that in the Christian church in China they have found that God always follows a difficult chapter with a good chapter, that bad times are followed by good times, that illness is followed by health. God intervenes and brings peace after periods of war, victory after periods of defeat and pleasure after periods of pain.

Certainly this is not a mathematical formula. And, unfortunately, there are some who have chapter after chapter of their lives full of suffering without particularly good chapters in between. But in this case it is the experience of Christians who know far more about suffering than most of us. And, it is consistent with what Peter is teaching us in 1 Peter 5:10: “*And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*”

God follows weakness with strength, suffering with relief, failure with success. This is a hope-giving expectation. God will see us through the present difficulty and bless us with a next chapter of life that is better than the last. He invites us to trust him, to believe in him and to expect the best. Trust, belief and expectation give us hope. As Christians we trust God for a better tomorrow.

Now, if I were Peter I would lay down my pen and call my book finished. He has taught us well. He has given us hope. That seems like a very good way to finish his book. Except probably Peter didn’t actually write anything we have studied from the five chapters in the book that bears his name. The reason I say that is because the New Testament book of 1 Peter is written in a high quality Greek that would be typical of the educated class of the Roman Empire and that’s not who Peter was. He was a fisherman. Greek was not his first language. At best, his writing would be second rate. So, in all probability, Peter told his assistant what to write rather than actually putting ink

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to parchment himself. The same thing had happened once before when Peter told the story of Jesus. Then Mark did the writing of Jesus’ biography that has become the second book of the New Testament. Except, this time his assistant and writer was a Christian named Silas.

The book was finished. All twenty principles were written. But, Peter wanted to at least write the postscript himself in his own handwriting. So, Peter grabs the pen and adds:

With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

As Peter adds his own personal thoughts he lists the names of those he considers to be the best examples of what it means to live Christianly in tough times. Silas was a good example. Silas had previously traveled as a missionary with St. Paul. Together they were attacked in the Greek city of Philippi. Here’s a paragraph from the story in Acts 16:22-24:

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Silas had been stripped naked, beaten, shackled, put in prison and had expected to be executed. Do you know what he did? He sang Christian hymns. He rejoiced in the midst of suffering that was probably far worse than any of us will ever experience. And God sent an earthquake and an angel to deliver him and to win his jailer to Jesus. Silas exemplified well that Peter’s principles worked.

A woman in Babylon was another good example. We’re not actually sure who she was or where she was. Some think she was Peter’s wife who herself became a martyr for Jesus. Some think

it was someone that everyone would have known but whose name has been lost through time. Some think this refers to the city of Babylon in Egypt that was settled by ex-patriot Jews. Others think it was the famous imperial city of Babylon. Others think it is a symbolic reference to Rome. But it doesn't really matter. Peter lifted up a first century woman as one of the best examples of Christian hope in the midst of the worst of circumstances. It has often been the case throughout history that women have exemplified Christian faith in the best of ways during the worst of times—often far better than men.

Mark is a third good example. Peter refers to him as his “son” and he may well have been his biological son. Mark was a common name in those days. There is no greater joy for a Christian father than to point to his own son as a man of God. But, it might also refer to the author of the Gospel according to Mark who was so close to Peter that he was like a son to him. Certainly there is far more to the story, perhaps it was well-known by the first century readers. Regardless, Peter cites Mark as yet another—in this case a younger—example of someone who had hope and lived Christianly in tough times.

But Peter has an expectation here that the list isn't finished. You almost sense that he doesn't want to lift the tip of the pen off the parchment. He wanted more names added; he wanted our names added. Hope among Christians was to be the norm, not just the faith of the few. He expected us to be on the list. That's why he tells us all to “stand fast”. He expected us to hang together in tough times and to “greet one another with a kiss.” That was a common form of greeting and solidarity among first century Christians. It still is in many parts of the world today. While we may feel culturally uncomfortable kissing or being kissed by everyone at church each week (some don't even like shaking hands!) we must not miss the point of warm close Christian fellowship as an expression of faith and an impetus to hope.

Peter expected all of us who are in Christ to experience the peace of Jesus even when suffering. And so he writes in 1 Peter 5:10-14:

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you

have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

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Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Before Peter puts his pen away, let's add our names to Peter's list. It is a list of those who are faithful to Jesus through every moment of life—the best and the worst, the pain and the pleasure, the highs and the lows. This is a list of those who have total commitment to Jesus Christ and total hope that no matter what . . . the best is yet to come!

Our Father, we thank you that you are there for us, that you haven't forgotten us, you haven't forsaken us. Thank you that we can trust you and depend on you.

Lord, hear our hearts as we affirm our faith in Jesus Christ, declaring anew our hope and confidence in you and our expectation that we will live for Jesus Christ, no matter what.

We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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