

1 Pet. 1:17-21
The Ground of Our Faith and Hope

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. ^[a] ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Intro:

Our text today speaks of two commodities, rather, aspects of our human existence that are most crucial and are of inestimable value. If you have them, you can endure any hardship that life may throw at you. If do not have them, you are poverty stricken, even though you may have millions of dollars in the bank.

Those two things are spoken of at the end of verse 21, "faith in God" and "hope in God." How can we have faith in God and hope in God? What is the basis, or ground, for faith and hope in God?

Our text will teach us this today.

Setting the Context:

Peter is addressing Christians in his letter. He is not just talking to everyone out there, everyone in the world. If you're writing a letter to your mom, you don't just tell her things in generalities that you could say to anybody, but you speak to her personally and out of your mutual and longstanding relationship. The things you say to her apply only to her – she is your mom – not every other woman out there in the world. So we need to consider the proper context here. Peter is writing to some Christians who lived in the Roman province of Asia Minor. It is a personal letter from an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ to Christian people.

If you belong to Jesus Christ, this letter is written to you. And if you're not sure if you belong to Jesus Christ, maybe today through this message you'll think about becoming a Christian, so that these great truths that we'll be looking at can apply to you personally.

In Chapter 1, verse 1, Peter makes it very specific who he is writing to.

Look at verses 1 and 2. Peter calls the recipients of this letter “strangers in the world,” those who’ve been chosen God through the work of the Holy Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled or cleansed for our sins by his blood.

Then in verse 3 he begins to praise God for his great mercy in give us a new birth – a spiritual birth – which results in us having a “living hope” by means of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. And he goes on to talk of how strong and certain this salvation is because we are shielded by God’s power as we await the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then what Peter does in the rest of this letter is to exhort us how we should live and behave and believe because we belong to Jesus Christ. This letter talks a lot about suffering – evidently the Christians to whom he was writing had been or were being persecuted for their faith. So even in the most trying circumstances we can have faith, hope, and joy in God because of the certainty of his purposes for us.

So today we will jump into the midst of this great letter of encouragement at verse 17.

We see the word “strangers” here again. Dr. Roy Metz, who preached on the opening verses of this epistle on two separate occasions in our church, likes to use the word “aliens” in place of “strangers.” By using that term he is stressing the fact that we don’t belong to this world anymore, to this world system with its particular values and philosophy and outlook and behavior. No – we now belong to Jesus Christ and the old sinful thinking and habits are something of the past, they’re part of our former existence – and we need to forsake them and live as those who now belong to Jesus Christ and are citizens of his kingdom. Yes, we’re still here on earth, but our heart is somewhere else. It is devoted to Jesus Christ. We still fee the tug of the old way of life and sometimes we may even fall back into it, but our goal and desire is to conform our lives to the beauty of Jesus Christ and live to please him and reflect him in the world.

So because the mercy of God has come to us in Jesus Christ, we call on God as Father. We pray to him. We belong to him. And we understand from the Bible what kind of God he is. He is not just come indulgent grandfather who winks at or ignores sin. No, we see that he is a Judge, an evaluator of men and women’s lives.

He is just; he can’t be bribed or ignored. He sees all and knows all. And he will judge every work we do. For these reasons he is to be feared. Do you fear God? If you fear God you are a blessed person. If you do not fear God, you need to, you desperately need to. To fear God, to respect him, to honor him, to live in an

awareness of his sovereignty and rule is the beginning of true wisdom – it is to take the road that leads to his kingdom.

The hymn expresses it well: Oh, how I fear thee living God, with deepest, tenderest fears...

Because God is the Judge who sees all and knows all and will judge every thought and word and deed of every human being, it should affect the way we live.

Think of that great Old Testament character in the book of Genesis, Joseph. When his masters wife tried to seduce him, what did he say? “How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” Gen. 39:9

So if we have come to experience the mercy of God in bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ, we should so live our lives in the fear of God. Since we call upon him as our heavenly Father, we must honor him by living our lives from now on as strangers or aliens to the world system, and live as citizens of Christ eternal kingdom.

But there is another reason we should live our lives in reverent fear: it’s because of what it took to rescue us from our sins.

In today’s world kidnapers do their dastardly deeds in order to get money. If you want to get your relative back you have to pay a gigantic sum of money.

But it took more than a gigantic sum of money to rescue you and me from our sins. It took the precious blood of Christ. The scripture says he was a lamb without blemish or defect. In other words, he was sinless. He didn’t have to go to the cross and suffer for your sins or my sins, but he did it anyway.

He had never sinned in the least bit; he was always perfectly pleasing to God. He had never offended God; he had never disappointed God; he had never grieved God. God never had to turn his face away from his Son. He always looked with greatest pleasure on His Son, for his Son was perfectly obedient to him and always delighted to do his will.

But then something great happened that only God could have thought of, and only God could have executed. God took all the wretched, ugly, damnable sins, every single one of them that every single one of his people had committed, and he took my sins and your sins and he put them on his Son and God the Holy Father burned in wrath against us sinners because of our sin, but he focused all his wrath on his beloved Son as his Son bore the sins of all his people.

It was such a terrible event, the unmitigated fury of God against our sins. It was unleashed without measure upon the Son of God as he hung on Calvary's cross. And it was so terrible that the whole land grew dark for those three hours while the wrath of God against his sinful people, like a mighty laser beam, shot out from God and was directed solely at his Son. And so the fury of God for our sins was poured out upon our Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Was there ever a Substitute like this Substitute? Someone may substitute for you at work and do your job for a day, or a foster mother or foster father may substitute for a real mother or father for a few years, or a board of governors may substitute for a king if he is too young to rule, or incapacitated for some other reason. But in all the annals of human history, was there ever a substitute who did what this Substitute did? He went to the heavenly court and made arrangements with the Judge of all men to be punished for the sins of his people, instead of them being punished.

And so it happened. Only God could have done this. Only the Son of God had the power and ability to be a Substitute for human sin. It is the most amazing thing: God's wrath against our sins poured out on his own Son, the Lamb of God, who was sacrificed for the sins of his people. The blood that was shed on the cross was the blood of the Son of God as he suffered and went to the cross to bear my sins and your sins and the sins of all his people of all time.

Oh, Son of God, we stand in awe of you. You, the innocent one, the pure one, the righteous one – willing to be our Substitute and pour out your own precious blood to pay the ransom price we owed God, the price we could never pay – the price we would have had to spend an eternity in hell to pay and would never have been able to pay off the debt.

But Jesus paid the debt: he poured out his precious blood, as a lamb without blemish or defect.

So we cannot ignore or neglect what Christ did for us his people. We should always thank Jesus our Lord that he was willing to suffer the wrath of God for our sins on the cross. What he did should profoundly and fundamentally change us ***from the inside out forever!***

Verse 20 tells us more of God's great plan to rescue a people for himself who would belong to Jesus Christ. God chose Jesus even before the world was created. The coming of Jesus into this world was not an afterthought of God, but was his plan all along. Even before he created the earth, even before Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden – before there was any universe or time or human beings, God had already arranged to send his Son to this planet where he would take upon himself our human nature and live as one of us. He was fully human and totally unrecognizable as being the Son of God except when he spoke and acted and then people heard and saw things that no man had ever said or done.

It's because he was the God-man – fully God he had taken on full humanity. His divinity was hidden by his humanity but he was still fully God. God cannot lose his divinity but he can veil it, and this is what God did in his Son.

The second half of verse 20 tells us when Jesus came and why he came. He came in “these last times.” This indicates that we are living at the end of human history and also that what Jesus did in securing the salvation of his people was his final and complete act. There will not be another.

But look at what it says at the end of this verse. He was revealed in these last times “for your sake.” Remember, Peter is writing to Christians, strangers and aliens in the world, not just to every person who was ever born. And he is telling Christians, he is telling us, that Jesus was chosen and revealed to be the Savior of the world “for your sake.”

Jesus did not die on the cross for the sake of all those billions of people to ignore him, rebel against him, hate him and reject him. No, the Bible says he died on the cross for his own people – “I lay down my life for my sheep” – he said. And if he laid down his life for you, it means he's paid the price you owed God for your sins, and you are now forgiven, and you've been given a spiritual birth and made a child of God and nothing can ever separate you from his love and mercy and power. You belong to Jesus Christ. Nothing can ever change that! God loves you and gave his Son to rescue you from your sins and he has done and will continue to do all it takes to bring you safely into his eternal kingdom.

So what is the trial you are facing today? It may be a great trial, and often the trials of life can be very difficult and overwhelming. But for those who belong to Jesus Christ there help from God and hope for the future and his presence and his power to sustain you and comfort you all the days of your pilgrim journey to the heavenly city. Great trials are a part of our lives, but for the Christian there is great joy in the midst of these trials.

God sent his Son for your sake. Christ died for your sake. He loves you and will stand by your side every moment of your earthly journey.

Peter here in his letter is being caught up in the greatness of Jesus Christ and his relationship to Christians and now tells us in **verse 21**, “**Through him you believe in God...**”

How do we come to believe in God? We don't come to believe in God by meditating on the beauty of the sunset. Yes, we may behold God's creative hand there and acknowledge that but we can only know a little bit about God through what's called “general revelation,” that is the eternal power and deity of God that is revealed to all people through his creation. General revelation can only take us to a certain point. It cannot save us from our sins. There is nothing that can save us from our sins except one person, that is the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot save yourself from your sins. How can you pay for even one sin that you have

committed? You have disobeyed and spurned the will of the almighty, just and wise creator by your self-absorbed devotion to what you wanted to do and think and say and how you wanted to live. Even one sin is an act of defiance, of disobedience, and failure of gratitude to all wise, good, and gracious God who made you and gives you life and breath every moment.

You cannot bring yourself to God; you cannot pay for your own sins; you cannot work your way into heaven by religious works. Only Jesus Christ can do this.

No other religious leader, no other founder of the great world religions, can bring you to God either. They may provide you with a system of religion but which one of them died on a cross to pay for your sins? Which one of them rose from the dead after 3 days? I tell you that none of them died for your sins, they were all sinful human beings like you and were totally incapable of dying for anybody's sins. Only Jesus Christ, the God-man, had the power and authority from God to die for and pay for human sin. And you must know this and believe this to be saved from your sins. And you must not only know this and believe this, you must commit yourself to Jesus Christ. You must bow before him as the Lord and Master of your life. You must take him as your Savior. You must live for his glory and fulfill his will in your life. You must be a life-long follower of Jesus, a disciple, a learner, who is continually learning from Jesus and learning about Jesus and following his will as he guides you through life.

So, how do you believe in God? Can you run to any other person, any other religious leader? Can you depend on yourself to save you? No, the scripture says "through him, through Jesus, you believe in God." Acts 4:12 says, "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name **under heaven** given among men by which we must be saved." It is no doubt that Christianity has an exclusive message. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) But this is the message of the Bible, of the Word of God, of Jesus Christ, and of the gospel he has entrusted to the church. The gospel is a message for all mankind, for every nation, every people group, and every culture. We do not have a right to make the rules; only God has the right to do that. But how do we know that the Christian message is the only message that will save mankind from their sin? It's because only Jesus Christ died to pay for our sins, and only Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

Hear what the apostle Paul said in preaching to the Greeks in Athens: Acts 17:31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

This is the message for the world and in particular the message for Christians. Look again at verse 21:

Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

It's through Jesus that we believe in God. Why is it through Jesus that we believe in God? It's because God raised him from the dead. Why do we have faith in God and have hope for the future? It's because of Jesus Christ. God sent his Son who died on the cross and then God raised him up out of the tomb.

If God had not raised his Son from the dead, we would have no grounds for believing that Jesus was the Son of God and Savior of the world. If he had not been raised from the dead then the OT prophecies about the resurrection of the Messiah could not have been applied to him, his own words predicting his death and subsequent resurrection would be shown to be mistaken, and death would have won out over him; it would have conquered him. And our sins would have remained unpaid for un-atoned for, still clinging to a dead prophet and we would still be in our sins.

But God did raise Jesus from the dead, thus demonstrating that his sacrifice for sins was accepted. And not only was he raised from the dead, but he was glorified by God – he was honored by God and crowned with glory and given dominion over all things.

My friends, Christianity stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. If he rose, Jesus spoke the truth and knew what he was talking about, and he demonstrated that he was the Son of God, mightier than death. But if he failed to rise from the dead, he was either deceived or a liar.

But indeed he did rise from the dead. He was seen by his closest disciples plus hundreds of other people. They spoke with him, touched him, and ate with him. This happened at least 10 times over a 40 day period as recorded in scripture.

On the 40th day of his resurrection appearances he was taken back up to heaven in his glorified, resurrected body, and there he rules and reigns over all things at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is probably the most verified fact of ancient history. Do you believe in the resurrection? If you're not sure, I urge you to read the gospel accounts of the resurrection of Christ. Read them with an open mind and heart. Ask God to show you, "Did Jesus really rise from the dead?"

You must believe that Jesus rose from the dead to be a Christian.

Rom. 4:24 says that just like the patriarch Abraham believed God would provide him a son in his old age and so God credited it to him as righteousness, so also for us "...

God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Rom. 10:9 says,

“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

What is the most important thing that you can do in this life? Is it to have a good job, a successful career, a nice house, to have good health, to have financial security, to have a happy family life? These things are important but there is something more important, no matter what successes or lack of successes you’ve had in life.

The most important thing is to have faith in God. What I mean is to trust in God daily and hourly and continually – trust in God becomes part of who you are. Not that you may not have doubts or failings or sins, these remain with us, but the longing of your life, the core of your life is a dependence on God, a fear of him, a reverence for him, a deep respect for him, and a desire to please him and obey him through his Word.

What is it that connects us in this way with God? It is Jesus Christ, the one sent by the Father to rescue a people for his name’s sake.

Jesus is the one who reveals the Father to us, and who enables us to come to the Father because of his cross and resurrection.

And because Jesus is coming back at the end of this age when he will be revealed in all his glory and splendor, and he will take raise his own people from the dead to take them to live with him forever in the New Heaven and New Earth, we have hope of a marvelous future. That hope enables us to persevere through the trials and hardships of life.

Our lives are before us. We don’t know how long we will have on this earth. But because Jesus rose from the dead, we believe he was the one and only Son of God whose death on the cross is effective for washing away our sins. So because of Christ’s work, his death and resurrection, we believe in God, we trust in him, and have the firm hope of being with Christ at his return. Rejoice and give thanks to God for his goodness to us his people.

(preached by Jeff Gregory, 5-8-11)

Additional Scripture references which confirm that God raised Christ from the dead:

Acts 2:24

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Acts 2:32

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Acts 3:15

You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

Acts 4:10

¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Acts 10:40

but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.

Acts 13:30

³⁰ But God raised him from the dead,

Acts 13:33

he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

“You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.

Acts 13:34

³⁴ The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words:

“I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.”

Acts 13:37

But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

Acts 17:31

For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

Rom. 6:4

⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Rom. 8:11

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Rom. 10:9

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

1 Cor. 6:14

⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.