

Easter Sunday - "Living Hope" 1 Peter 1:3-9

1. In the wider culture where is hope located? What is the current state of such hope?

For the last few centuries we in the west have been animated by the hope that through human ingenuity, scientific advancement, social transformation, the throwing off of religious superstition that we would move as a human race toward a future of greater safety, prosperity and freedom than ever before. A hope that every subsequent generation would experience a better world than the last.

On the heels of the worst pandemic in a century, the promise of more to come, geopolitical tension across the globe, war tearing apart nations, threat of nuclear holocaust, economic disparity widening, financial uncertainty broiling, the me too and black lives matter movements exposing deep injustice, a planet on the precipice of climate catastrophe that hope is hanging on by a thread at best.

The question may be – will we look for hope in another place – or wait for circumstances to change to restore our hope in human progress?

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9

2. What does it mean to be born-again?

This is often used as an identity marker for a particular kind of Christian. This type of Christian is often seen as the overly emotional type, who sign on to a more fundamentalist mindset. While this may be a identifier for a certain group of Christians the bible knows nothing but born again Christians. To be a Christian is to be born again.

Every single one of us began as a seed, a single cell. Loaded into that cell was everything that was needed to make you you. Your life, your very nature is the unfolding of the genetic material found in that seed that single cell.

From the moment you lay a hold of Jesus by faith you are born again. This is not the turning over a new leaf by moral reformation. This is God planting within us a seed of a new humanity. Planting a new power, a new identity right at the very root of our hearts. A new you begins to grow inside, forming in you new loves, not ambitions, new desires and new hopes. Changing you organically, incrementally all the way through your life. This is all a gift, a gift of grace, received by faith.

3. The central driver of this new humanity is a living hope. Hope is what we believe about your future. What does Peter invite us to believe about our future?

(vs. 4) An inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for us.

At first blush this will confirm in many people's minds that this is a heavenly, spiritual, ethereal future. In fact this is likely what many within your group will immediately think of. As a result it may be difficult to consider that Peter may have something else in mind altogether.

Indeed he does. This future is kept in heaven for us, but it will be revealed at the last time (vs. 5), upon the revelation of Jesus (vs. 7). This inheritance is only kept safe in heaven but will be brought to earth when Jesus returns. This inheritance is found throughout the scripture. It is a future of no more pain or sorrow, tears wiped from every eye. It is a future of no more violence, for the lion and the lamb lie down together. It is a future where every tongue and tribe and nation come together as one before the throne of Jesus. It is the healing of every disease, the mending of every wound, the restoring of every relationship... and so so so much more.

Imperishable – rust and decay can't touch it.

Undeiled – no sin – pride, greed, envy etc... will mar it

Unfading – it's beauty will never lose it's luster, it is new every morning.

Depending on the make-up of your group there may be some concern that we are letting go of the truth of the gospel – for many years it has been taught – accept Jesus and you'll go to heaven when you die. There indeed may be a temporary holding place where the dead in Christ wait for the fulfillment of Jesus' salvation but that was never intended to be the goal. The goal is new creation and it is focusing on that goal that forms in us the patterns of the kingdom that we are invited to live in anticipation of. Letting go of what we believed was the gospel is never easy, we must rely upon the Spirit and be patient. This hope however is not only (I believe) more biblical it is far more glorious.

This living hope brings us a deepening joy and a deepening sorrow at the same time. This produces in us the genuine fruit of faith which will result in praise and honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus.

Read Matthew 25:31-46

4. What is the genuine fruit of this living hope that receives praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus?

It is the hungry fed, the naked clothed, the sick and captives visited. It is looking at the reality of new creation and living in anticipation of it. It is asking ourselves the question what will last into the new creation and investing all into it.

It would help to fill out this question a bit by exploring what ways of being are consistent with this new creation.

It would also help a bit to fill out this question by the shocking affirmation that at the revelation of Jesus it is his servants who will receive praise and honour and glory.

(Of course – those who receive such praise know that it is only due to the seed of new creation planted in them that enabled this reality – so they return such praise to Jesus. They receive crowns only to lay those crowns down before Jesus' feet – Revelation 4:10-11)

5. How does our joy in this new creation mingled with our sorrow of the way the world is now form in us this fruit?

Perhaps these examples would help...

We sorrow where there is hunger and economic disparity for the joy of the kingdom is a feast for all.

We sorrow where there is bondage for the kingdom is where there is freedom from all that enslaves.

We sorrow for divisions between people for the kingdom is the joy of every tongue and tribe and nation coming together as one before Jesus.

We sorrow where there is disease for the joy of the kingdom is the healing of every infirmity.

We sorrow for every sin we encounter for the joy of the kingdom is that sin will ravage no more.

That deep sorrow and deep joy at the same time bubbles over into action. Captives freed, hungry fed, sick ministered to, divisions healed, sin repented of.

This is a new way of living for we are citizens not of this world but citizens of new creation in this world. This will impact what we do with our money. What we do for work, how we work. The clothes we wear, don't wear. The companies we support, don't support. The habits we foster and those we lay down.

What we do now that is consistent with new creation will be the building blocks of that new creation. What we do now that is in anticipation of that new creation will remain, will last, for it is the fruit of new creation that has been planted within us.