

The Answer People Need to Hear: Hope

1 Peter 3:8-22

I begin with what is, perhaps, an easy question to answer. Here it is -- What does it mean to be a Christian? If you are one this morning, how would you answer that question? You're sitting with a friend who knows you go to church, you pray about stuff, read your Bible. He/she asks, "You're a Christian, right? Why? I mean, what does that mean?"

How would you boil it down, say it so simply, so that someone who didn't get it could walk away with a crystal clear idea of what you are all about? Is a Christian...

- Someone who is better than others?
- Someone who has a membership with a church... always sacrifices a key day off to go to a special building and sing songs, and listen to religious speeches?
- Someone with an exhaustive knowledge of the Bible from cover to cover?
- Someone who walks around condemning everyone else (because they are not like "me")? Is that a Christian?
- Someone who has all the answers to all the tough questions, all the comebacks for all of the objections?

What does it simply mean to be a Christian? In *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller again offers this:

A Christian is literally "Christ's one," someone who is not just vaguely influenced by Christian teaching, but who has switched his or her most fundamental allegiance to Jesus.

The confession of Christians is CHRISTOS KURIOS - "Christ is LORD." [The Romans] were required to say KAISER KURIOS, "Caesar is Lord"...[the Christian] confession meant that Jesus was the supreme power...Jesus had "the name above every name" (Philippians 2:9).ⁱ

A Christian. A "Christ-One." A fundamental allegiance to Jesus. Christos Kurios. Simple. Clear.

Today, if you're a Christian, the most important question you may ever be asked is not whether or not God exists, or about the Bible and science, or even can you explain why God allows volcanoes to bury vacation homes and 3rd world villages.

No, perhaps the most important question you'll get is this – ***DO YOU HAVE HOPE? As a Christian, do you have hope? Why?***

It's the question for our day. There's not a week that passes, not a newscast that is broadcast but that we are either killing one another or we are killing ourselves...both the famous and the not so famous

- ✓ 123 suicides a day, 45K-50K per year...veterans, teenagers, the highest suicide rate in over 30 years
- ✓ Today 1 in every 5 Americans experiencing clinical depression? We are the most medicated country in the world.
- ✓ One professional asks, "Is our Society manufacturing Depressed People?"ⁱⁱ
- ✓ Why do millennials openly acknowledge that "depression IS the disease of the 21st century"? A society that mantras "a Prozac a day keeps the blues away"? (but not really)

You're a Christian. Your allegiance is to Jesus. *Christos Kurios*. Do you have hope? What would you be prepared to say, clearly?

I believe if the Apostle Peter were here this morning, he'd look us straight on and say

***You have hope, I have hope,
because I am a sojourner in Christ.***

Will you find a copy of his letter in your Bible (p.1014 ESV), and let's give the Holy Spirit a chance to explain what Peter means. A letter about **HOPE**...something (as Charles Swindoll once reminded usⁱⁱⁱ)

*As important to us as water is to fish,
as vital as electricity is to a light bulb,
as essential as air to a jumbo jet --
HOPE is that basic to life*

What kind of HOPE do sojourners in Christ have?

#1 As a sojourner in Christ, I realize this isn't all there is. 1 Peter 1:1,4-9,17, 2:11

Peter clearly describes Christians are "sojourners" –

- We are "elect **exiles**" (1:1)
 - *those who are barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons.*
 - *the condition being exiled, or a person who is exiled^{iv}*
 - *A person who lives away from their native country, either from choice or compulsion^v*
- Our present life is the "time of (my) exile (1:17)
- We are (2:11) "**sojourners** and exiles" (2:11) who fighting a war waged against our soul
 - *to stay for a time in a place; live temporarily^{vi}*
 - *a period of time when you stay in a place as a traveler or guest^{vii}*

But Peter also reminds us about where the eyes and hearts of sojourning exiles are focused:

¹Peter 1:3 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, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ 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.

⁸Though 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, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Honestly, has this truth of these verses taken over your life yet? That in comparison, THE LIFE WE HAVE NOW— even when it is peppered with (vs.6) "various trials" -- is NOTHING when compared to the GUARANTEED LIFE THAT IS COMING?

"Who can mind the journey," wondered the great Bible teacher James M. Gray, "when the road leads home?" [Swindoll adds] How can we concern ourselves that much over what happens on this temporary planet when we know that it is all leading us to our eternal destination? There is no way (he continues) that we will be lost in the process of suffering. No disorder, no disease, not even death itself can weaken or threaten God's ultimate protection in our lives. "God stands between you and all that menaces your hope or threatens your eternal welfare," James Moffat wrote. "The protection here is entirely and directly the work of God."^{viii}

As a sojourner in Christ, I "accept" and "trust" that this is not all there is.

#2 As a sojourner in Christ, I always trust to receive the best from the Lord. 1 Peter 3:8-13

¹ Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” ¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

Peter begins with how sojourning exiles can hopefully "travel" to what's ahead, to their home country, together. Note how 3:8-9 answer the question, "What should others see in Jesus' hopeful disciples?" They should count on seeing

- **unity of mind** (people with prepared minds about what life is about and where they are headed)
- **sympathy** (understanding for one another along the way; everybody is facing different stuff)
- **brotherly love** ("philadelphia" – word for love that speaks of friendship)
- **tender hearts** (hearts that are both compassionate and courageous)
- **humble minds** (Paul, Phil 2:3, "In humility count others more significant than yourself", ESV)

Among those traveling to heaven – in a church that is healthy, let there be a Christ-centered supportive culture.

At Christ Community Church, we describe our life together this way

- transparent relationships
- intergenerational discipleship
- purposeful responsiveness
- radical generosity

In fact, (Peter adds), you should see THIS! – "radical generosity"

¹ Peter 3:9 *Do not **repay** evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, **for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.***

We sojourners travel this way – known for *our remarkable responses, our surprising grace and generosity* -- because on most legs of journey, on most days, the Lord blesses us with the best of life when we are committed to Him. Peter quotes from **Psalm 34:12-16**

¹⁰for “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹²For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” ¹³Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

Reflect for a moment on what we just read. **We hopeful sojourners are called to exceptional living.**

We have a compass for what it means to “love life and see good days.” It’s the Spirit of God expressing the very person and life of Jesus through us in (vss.10-12)

- refusing to allow our mouths to express evil, deceitful things (vs.10)

- refuse to participate in evil, and be marked by doing good, seeking, pursuing peace with others (vs.11)
- living before the watchful eyes of the Lord (vs.12)
- praying to a God whose ears are open to us (vs.12)

Found in the volume *Character above All*^x

are 10 essays on the ten United States presidents from Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930's to George Bush 41 in the 1990's, each written by people who knew those presidents well—friends, speechwriters, fellow politicians, and other colleagues who worked alongside of them.

The 22 page chapter on Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) was written by Peggy Noonan, his speechwriter. She finishes the chapter this way. There was about Reagan a “Lincoln-like kindness” that was a part of his character. “Everyone who worked with Reagan has a story about his kindness.”

About this, someone offered an application – “Go back and [hear] those eleven words [again]...wouldn't it be great if that could be said about each of us?...how wonderful to be remembered for our kindness?” That's what Peter is saying. Hopeful sojourners travel well – they are known for mouths dedicated to speaking what is true and good, for living marked by doing good and seeking peace, a life lived rightly before God's watchful eye, hearts full of eager, expectant prayer.

Hopeful sojourners live with spiritual excellence, expecting the best from the Lord.

And yet, there are times – stretches of the journey – ***when we face the worst***. Peter:

^{3:14} But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Peter's point?

#3 As a sojourner in Christ, I frame unfair circumstances as opportunity for hopeful witness.

1 Peter 3:14-17

Please NOTE THE SITUATION: *suffering for righteousness sake* This is when we suffer for “doing good,” for “doing the right thing.” Times described in an ancient Hebrew document called *The Wisdom of Solomon*^x; it describes the “enemies of the suffering righteous”:

Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for our sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training. He professes to have knowledge of God and calls himself a child of the Lord. He became to us a reproof of our thoughts; the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange. We are considered by him as something base; he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father (Wis 1:12-16).

Ever been there? You're the one making some in your family uncomfortable because you kindly, quietly do not agree with the immorality being practiced by your parents or your children or your siblings.

You're the one who won't run his/her mouth through the gutter just to fit in, or get stupid-drunk or high just to say you're all having fun. You're the one who gets labeled an intellectual pigmy because you are confident the Bible is God's Word, and Jesus is the savior of the world. That's the situation...so carefully notice the Holy Spirit's instruction (vss.14-15)

- **Something to KNOW** - know that you will be blessed...and what is happening IS GOD'S WILL (vs.14)
- **Something to REFUSE**- refuse to be afraid or upset (vs. 14b)
- **Someone to HONOR** - honor CHRIST in your heart as HOLY (i.e., He uniquely deserves your worship and loyalty, vs. 15)
- **Something to EXPLAIN**: BE PREPARED to EXPLAIN (when you are being treated this way) YOU HAVE HOPE (vs.15b)
- **Some way to WITNESS**: OFFER your EXPLANATION with humility (vs.15b)

Rather than be discouraged or retreating, take advantage of what some might regard as the worst – that which is totally unfair. There is a unique opportunity from God in it.

God is a Master Artist. And there are aspects of your life and character-good, quality-things He wants others to notice. So without using blatant tricks or obvious gimmicks, God brings the cool, dark contrast of suffering into your life. That contrast, laid up against the golden character of Christ within you, will draw attention . . . to him. Light against darkness. Beauty against affliction. Joy against sorrow. A sweet, patient spirit against pain and disappointment-major contrasts that have a way of attracting notice. You are the canvas on which he paints glorious truths, sharing beauty, and inspiring others. So that people might see Him.

[Joni Eareckson Tada]

What this means for sojourning disciples

Don't you just love how Peter encourages us here?! We don't have to be set back on our heels, or be intimidated by others, or make excuses as if we have something to apologize for. Our HOPE is our best answer. Peter's apostolic colleague Paul put it like this:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer man is wasting away, our inner man is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things which are unseen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Our HOPE is our best answer.

Nothing will convince and convict those around us like the peaceful and positive way you and I respond to our twentieth century hurts and distress. The unbelieving world-your neighbors, the guy at the gas station, the postman, the lady at the cleaners, your boss at work-is observing the way we undergo our trials.

[Joni Eareckson Tada]

This passage is a call from this seasoned apostle to choose to live expectantly. Fr. John Powell^{xi} - "Two men looked out from prison bars. One saw mud, one saw stars." In the pursuit of the fullness of human life, everything depends on this frame of reference, this habitual outlook, this basic vision which I have of myself, others, life, the world, and God. What we see is what we get. Our HOPE is our best answer.

Living expectantly means more than just believing in church doctrines; it means more just than trusting my life to God. Living expectantly is faith on tiptoe. Living expectantly means believing with God that life is worth living, believing that ministry will never become routine for me, believing that in God I will never experience the dullness of the daily. I live in the expectancy that in my life God will do a new thing that will transcend the past.
Benjamin Reaves, Leadership, Vol. 10, no. 2.

Your Questions...

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ⁱ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Riverhead books, 2008), 238-239.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shift-mind/201203/is-our-society-manufacturing-depressed-people>

ⁱⁱⁱ 20 years ago in Swindoll, Charles R., *Hope Again: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade* (Word Publishing, 1996).

^{iv} <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/exile>

^v <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/exile>

^{vi} <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/sojourner>

^{vii} <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sojourner>

^{viii} Swindoll, 15-17.

^{ix} Currently, out of print.

^x According to <https://gotquestions.org/Wisdom-of-Solomon.html> The Wisdom of Solomon, also called the Book of Wisdom, is one of the books of the [Apocrypha](#). The others in the group are 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Manasseh, and 1 and 2 Maccabees. The books of the Apocrypha are accepted primarily by the Roman Catholic Church and are included in Catholic Bibles. The Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical books teach many things that are not true and are not historically accurate. The Roman Catholic Church officially added the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonicals to their Bible at the Council of Trent in the mid-1500s AD, primarily in response to the [Protestant Reformation](#). None of the apocryphal books are included in the [canon of Scripture](#). The Wisdom of Solomon was believed by some to have been written by King Solomon, although his name appears nowhere in the text. However, the early church rejected the authorship of Solomon; an ancient manuscript known as the Muratorian fragment refers to the Wisdom of Solomon as having been written by "the friends of Solomon in his honor." It is widely accepted today, even by the Catholic Church, that Solomon did not write the book, which dates back to the 1st or 2nd century BC, many centuries after the death of Solomon.

^{xi} in *Through Seasons of the Heart*. Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 14.