

## The Sure and Living Hope

1 Peter 1:3–9

Dear friends in Christ

Grace and peace from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Have you ever been called “Hopeless”? Or perhaps you have called somebody else “hopeless.” If not a person, perhaps you may have found a situation, a condition to hopeless.

With your permission, let me share with you a situation that seemed hopeless. Is the story of my father who left the church for a time, almost 40 years. For most of that time we did pray for him until one day a couple of years ago, he was drawn back to faith.

My family begun to attend church back when I was 8 or and 9 years old, the congregation they picked is a locally formed denomination which is mixture of Mennonite and Presbyterian background, the Assembly of the sound Doctrine they call it. My Dad attended faithfully for a couple of years, but then he stopped, and his faith began to grow cold, literally stopped being Christian. He felt he was better without Christ. He resented our faith growth, my sibling’s, and certainly my mom’s. He would be upset every time we dedicated time for church activities. My mom became one of the leaders in the congregation, which meant she would spend lots of time at church, and whenever she spent lots of time at church, he would start a fight. A few years later after joining the Lutheran Church and then graduated from bachelor in theology program in Guatemala, he almost disowned me. He wanted me to become a doctor or something like that, except being a pastor which I was pursuing at that time. To him I was disrespectful of my father for studying theology.

Our relationship with him wasn’t the best. But we loved him and wanted him to remain in the Gospel, so we prayed for him for all that time. Or almost that time, because as you see, the more we prayed for him, the more he seemed to distance himself from anything related to the church and ultimately God. His ranting against the church increased. The situation became more hopeless. Many times, I shook my head

in desperation and almost gave up, it felt to no use keeping praying for him and his salvation, but we did.

I must confess that when we came to Canada, my spiritual life wasn't the best, given the difficulties we lived in Guatemala which prompted our leaving the country, so my prayer for him kind of faltered. But as my faith was sparked again by the encouragement of some of you here, in this congregation, my prayer for my dad resumed. Overall prayers for his faith were said for almost 40 years even when many times, it seemed hopeless, a lost case, futile. And whenever we visited Guatemala, I would have conversations with him regarding faith. But his denial of God become even stronger. He would complain that if God existed then, why bad things happen, or if God existed then he must be a terrible God, therefore not worth our allegiance. For him it was better to conclude there was no God.

But long story short, in the first year of covid restrictions something happened. What always seemed a hopeless situation, the Risen Christ takes hold of his life and brings him back to a living hope.

Some of you remember that I did devotions in Spanish. On day I called them, and as usual my mom answered the phone, whenever I call it is with her alone that I talk, but not this time. He grabbed the phone from my mom, and what he began to say was almost surprising. He said that every day they would look forward to my devotion. They were in his words "wonderful" and that he now was praying for me, for the congregation here, for his children, grandchildren and even the great grandchildren.

Then about two months after that day, one of my brothers shared with us that Dad had returned to church, he "reconciled" as they call confession and absolution in that congregation. And since then, he has been so faithful, almost never missing a Sunday. His regret is that he didn't do this for the last 40 years, and that there are Sundays he can't be there because of his health, but that—in his own words—has a given a living hope. What seemed hopeless is now hopeful, what seemed futile, and dead is now alive, what seemed impossible is now possible. Actually, I think it always was possible, it always was hopeful, because it was in God's hands. We had left him in God's hands, that was the content of our prayer. And one day God says, I reclaim you, because you belong to me.

His future is guaranteed, his sins have been forgiven, life eternal awaits him, and hope has been restored to him. And to us it is a reminder that we were called to a living hope. Our prayers have been answered, our hearts are delighted, hope has been always there, but now becomes so clear that no matter what we go through, if we keep our eyes on Christ is taken care of, even if it takes 40 years.

And what about the hardship, or whatever we faced in the process? Well, that was a test of faith as Peter says in his epistle reading today: “if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> 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 honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Now, I don’t claim my faith to be more precious than gold, but certainly all glory and honor be to God in Jesus Christ for his work in us. After all “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...” Peter says.

Sure, at times it seemed to be a hopeless situation, in part because we are humans prone to doubt, and second, we forget to let God act in his own time and his own purposes.

I imagine it was the same for the disciples when Jesus was taken away from them, to be crucified and buried. I imagine, based on my own strength, that all they saw was hopelessness, their master whom they trusted and followed for the last three years is being convicted, then crucified and buried. What can the outcome be? Disappointment of course. Hopelessness can disappoint a person horribly.

But of course, they didn’t get the whole picture yet, and weren’t fully aware that through Jesus’ death and resurrection they will be springboarded to a total new and wonderful life. Not springboarded, oh no, but borne to a new life, a totally different and new life, that is for their time and for eternity.

As you see, eternal life is a sure and living hope because God has won it and keeps it for you. And it is not only a futuristic hope, but it is for here and now as we experience the new birth in Christ. When Peter he says “he has caused us to be born again,” means here and now, experiencing a new life, a new nature, a new being, the “new man.” And that new life springs into eternity with an “inheritance that is

imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” This is good news indeed!

Good news worth pondering about today. And in doing so check if perhaps we are looking for or hoping for something else. Typically, what we, people, hope for is what will make us happy.

Human psychology suggests that your hope ought to have a goal, an actionable pathway, and a sense of continued motivation, and it needs to be painstakingly specific. So, what are you hoping for? What is your goal? A new job? A new relationship? A new car? To get out of some dire situation you have no control over, perhaps. If so, remember that all those goals are subject to the whims of our human desire. And human desires don't always align with God's desire. That's because our desires are always for things that one day will perish. The new job may be given to someone else or not be exactly what you were led to believe. The new relationship may not last and may bring you trials. The car will eventually suffer mechanical issues and lose value with age, and you'll have to generate a new goal, or a hope, to replace it. The dire situation may not go away, and what is all left is suffering. As you see that kind of hope is temporal.

Next, a desirable hope requires an actionable pathway to make your hope a reality. Think about one of your goals. Does your actionable pathway to get it involve harming relationships, stepping over someone? Is your pathway in keeping with the laws of the land? With the Law of God? Does your pathway prioritize things according to your sinful nature? Does your pursuit itself keep you emotionally happy?

Remember that our experiences with earthly hopes always have the possibility of not being fulfilled or driving our life experience into the realms of vanity or despair.

Now, what about eternal things? We ought to have life plans for sure, we ought to aspire to big things, but remember they are temporal, they are never to replace what matters most, and what matters most is living hope!

Now that's something you ought to plan for, think of, and pursue, because the eternal hope, the hope that comes from Jesus who is our resurrection, is divinely unique. It is eternal and God-given, and it is worth keeping it. It is not a wish, but a divine promise. Although most of it is yet to be fulfilled, we can certainly enjoy its

benefits here and now. My father's coming back to faith is certainly a reason to thank God for his unending mercy in our family's life. So I pray that the Lord would bless you, and our testimony may it be as an encouragement for you as you confront and deal with your own hopeless situations. With your personal plans, with family members and relationships. As you keep praying for someone's salvation, as you make it your goal to share the Gospel with others, even as you face your own trials and tribulations, remember that in your baptism you become first and foremost a new creature, you are born again, you are the fruit of Jesus resurrection! Therefore, you have the Living hope!

When I heard that my father came back faith, that was wonderful and delightful news! Because of the promises and treasures of heaven given to us through Jesus.

Now imagine the life eternal with Christ. It will be as magnificent and wonderful as when it was first won for us by Christ! Because God won it for us, it is imperishable, just as is God's Word. It doesn't decay or fade away. It is undefiled, for nothing earthly can get to it in the heavenly realms.

Thanks be to God for his great mercy, for there is nothing within us that can merit his favor. In us there is only sin, death, defilement, rebellion, but Christ's death on the cross paid for all of your transgressions against God. It is Christ's death and resurrection alone that won you forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. And keeps you in the path to glory through his word and the sacraments. And whenever you falter, he gently brings you back to your goal. And when you face trials and temptations on that path, he protects and strengthens you along the way, after all, God never promised you would always be happy. Being happy is a day-by-day thing. There are always things that will take away your happiness. But Christ will keep you joyful and hopeful, for he is our living hope!

Christian joy cannot be taken away from you. And that Christian joy is given to you in the forgiveness of your sins, in your salvation and in the comfort of risen Christ's presence here and now. Yes eternal life in a glorified body is yet to be given at the resurrection, but nothing in creation can take these gifts from you as you remain in Christ.

Rejoice! Because Christ lives, you shall live. As he is risen from the dead, so shall you. As he has caused you to be born again, he has you in living hope, so keep on

praying, keep on studying God's word, keep on trusting that your life is in his hands, keep on praying, 40, 50, 60 years, no matter, even when things seem hopeless remember his is our living hope, he will change our hopelessness into true hope, here and for eternity, and in that eternity behold our Savior face to face in all is glory!

And until that day, we join Peter in saying: "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, <sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

In his name, amen!