

A LIVING HOPE

1 Peter 1:1-9

Key Verse 1:3

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”

A most happy and blessed New Year 2025! I have chosen 1 Peter 1:3 as our UBF key verse, with the theme, “A living hope.” Hope is essential in our Christian lives. When we have hope, we are full of strength and joy and can live dynamic lives. But if we lose hope, we despair. Then, even though we may make a big smile, dark thoughts fill our hearts, and we are vulnerable to the devil’s mischief. We need hope. We need hope more than we need oxygen. The young people of our time need hope. Many suffer from anxiety, depression and even suicidal ideation. They are helpless. They need shepherds who can plant hope in their hearts. What hope has the Lord given us? Apostle Peter tells us it is a living hope. As we embrace this living hope, we can be victorious in this new year and plant hope in others.

Apostle Peter wrote this letter around A.D. 63 during the reign of the wicked Roman Emperor Nero. Scattered Christians, in the region we now know as Turkey, were going through fiery persecution. Peter encourages them to overcome their trials, to influence their societies, and advance the reign of Christ. In these opening verses, he reminded them that they were God’s chosen people, and that they have a living hope. Then he taught them how they should live. Let’s listen to his words.

First, we are God’s chosen people (1:1-2; 2:9,11). Peter introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. This means that his message was not his own human idea; it was from Jesus Christ. He addresses believers as “God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1). Peter’s words seem to be paradoxical. His audience is both “God’s elect” and “exiles.” They were chosen by God, but outcasts in the world. They lived in tension. Some had left their nation Israel when persecution scattered the early church. Many had lost their jobs and left their homes. They had become strangers in foreign lands (1:17; 2:11). We can imagine how difficult their lives were: missing their family members, working menial jobs to survive, confronting language and cultural barriers. Moreover, they were discriminated against and alienated.

Apostle Peter understood their situation well, but did not pity them. Rather, he reminded them that they were “God’s elect.” “Elect” means that God had chosen them. Verse 2 begins, “who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” God chose them before they made a choice to believe in him. God chose them by his unsearchable wisdom. It was God’s eternal choice, made with a clear purpose. It was not something they earned or deserved, but a gift of grace originating in God’s love. God had chosen them. The night before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you...” (Jn 15:16). The disciples could overcome fiery trials by holding onto Jesus’ calling; they became new history makers. This grace of choosing is given to all who trust in Jesus. Knowing that God chose us gives us confidence in

God and his grace rather than ourselves and our merit. How is God's choosing expressed? Verse 2 says, "through the sanctifying work of the Spirit...." God sends the Holy Spirit to his chosen people. The Holy Spirit sets us apart from the corruption of the world; the Holy Spirit draws us to Christ; the Holy Spirit equips us to carry out his holy mission. As the Holy Spirit works in us, we are sure of God's choosing.

Why does God choose people? Naturally, we think it is for us "to do" something. But here Peter says it is for us "to be" something. Verse 2 says, "...to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood...." Here the word "obedient" means to listen attentively to and follow. As we listen to Jesus' words and follow him, our lives change. Our sinful desires subside, and holy desires grow in us. Selfish people become sacrificial. Sorrowful people become joyful. Fearful people become courageous. Angry people become peaceful. We grow in love, joy and peace. In a word, we become more like Jesus. This is God's desire for us. This does not happen by our own effort. We are sinful. But as we repent and confess our sins each day, the Holy Spirit applies Jesus' blood to us. He forgives our sins and cleanses us. Our changed lives reveal God's goodness, power and love and bring glory to him.

After identifying himself and God's chosen people, Peter begins his message to them, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance." Even though they faced many hardships and difficulties, they could experience abundant grace and peace in their daily lives—not just drips and drops, but overflowing, abundant grace and peace. It comes from God and is given freely by his love.

In the first two verses, Peter has mentioned God the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus – the Holy Trinity. God's sovereign grace, the Holy Spirit's active presence, and Jesus' cleansing blood are all at work in us. The Triune God's power and love are irresistible; he always finishes what he starts. As we trust in him, we have assurance of our salvation.

However, the world does not honor us as God's chosen people. Rather, the world regards us as strangers and weird. It is because our lifestyle and value system reveal God's holy presence, expose people's unbelief, and warn of the coming judgment. People should repent. Instead, they treat us with contempt, suppressing the truth of God. They may slander us through social media. In addition, sometimes our beloved coworkers may say thoughtless or critical words that stick in our minds. Moreover, we can be overwhelmed by our own sins, faults and weaknesses. Then we can doubt that we are really God's children. We develop a kind of spiritual amnesia and forget all of God's grace and work in our lives. We become victims of spiritual identity theft. At such times we must listen to God's words, "You are a chosen people" (1Pe 2:9) The living God has chosen us to be his children. The living God, the Creator of heaven and earth, is our Father. His love for us never fails; he hears our prayers; he protects and provides for us; he guides us in the best way. He gave us a great mission to share the gospel with those who are lost. We can offer hope to the nations. We are very precious in the sight of God. Let's deeply accept that we are God's chosen people.

Second, our living hope: an eternal inheritance (1:3-5). After reminding believers they are God's chosen people, Peter proclaimed what our hope is. Hope is vital. Without hope, we despair. Despair poisons our minds and hearts, just as surely as a snake's venom poisons our blood. It is

the disease that leads to death. What is worse, the devil torments despairing people, accusing and condemning them. This is what drives so many young people to feelings of worthlessness. This is why they waste their time in trivial pursuits, and don't value their own lives. People desperately need some kind of hope. Hope makes us feel alive and empowers us to do great things. The now retired boxer George Foreman once faced a dark night of the soul. After losing a fight and going through painful trials, he was in "a hellish, frightening place of nothingness and despair." He asked God for help and felt called to repent. He cried out, "I still believe in God." Hope arose in his heart. He began a new life as a Christian preacher. Later he returned to boxing and regained the heavyweight championship at the age of 45. Hope made his life totally different. We must have hope. However, our true hope is not in this world. The things of this world all perish, spoil and fade away. When they do, our hope in them turns to disappointment. Our ultimate hope must be eternal. While young, we may feel that we will live forever. As we age, we become more aware of our limits. The truth is that inevitably, everyone dies. After death comes God's judgment (Heb 9:27). Everything will be left behind: our achievements, possessions, even our families. What can be our hope?

Let's read verse 3: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." God is so merciful to us. He has given us a living hope. We were helpless under the power of sin and death. We could do nothing to save ourselves. Money, education, science, technology, good deeds—none of these could save us. But in his great mercy, God sent Jesus into the world to die for our sins. Then God raised him from the dead. The Risen Christ ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. He gives eternal life to anyone who believes in him. This eternal life begins the moment we trust in Jesus. Though our bodies will die, our souls live forever. For us, death is now the entry into a glorious new life in the presence of Christ. St. Paul says this is "better by far" than our present life (Php 1:23). At death, "The souls of the righteous are made perfect in holiness and go to be with the Lord in the highest heavens. They are conscious, active, and happy, and behold the face of God" (Westminster Catechism). D.L. Moody's last words were: "I see earth receding; Heaven is opening; God is calling me." He passed into everlasting glory. This is what happens at death to all who believe in Jesus. We enter eternal glory in the presence of our Heavenly Father who loves us.

To be with the Lord in eternity seems to be reward enough. But the blessings that God has promised to his children are greater still. Look at verse 4. "...and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you..." The children of God receive an inheritance. It is his everlasting kingdom (Ro 8:17). Peter contrasts this inheritance with worldly ones. Parents often leave an inheritance for their children. But these inheritances do not last forever. Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877) accumulated a \$100 million dollar fortune through the railroad business. In today's equivalent this would be \$2.4 billion. Just six generations later, his descendant Anderson Cooper said, "The entire fortune has dwindled to almost nothing." In contrast, the inheritance God gives his children can never perish, spoil or fade. It cannot be stolen, ruined or lost.

What is this inheritance? Jesus told his disciples, "My Father's house has many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you...I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am" (Jn 14:2-3). Jesus is preparing a place for his people in his Father's

house. It is kept in heaven for us until Jesus returns. Revelation 21:1-4 says, "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" We will inherit the New Jerusalem, the most glorious, everlasting city of God. It is a huge and holy city built of the most dazzling materials. It will be the central city of the new earth, which is free from the power of sin and death. No bad things are there. It is totally safe and secure. It will be a place of spectacular beauty. To dwell in this eternal home, Jesus will give us resurrection bodies. These bodies are imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1Co 15:42-44). We have such a rich inheritance from our Father God. As we await this inheritance, God protects our lives by his power as we trust in him. God's power and promise guarantee our inheritance. We surely receive it when Jesus comes again (5).

This living hope and eternal inheritance is like an anchor for our souls (Heb 6:19). We are vulnerable to the devil's temptations, health problems, financial issues, trials with our children, or tragedies, like the sudden death of a loved one. But with the living hope as our anchor, we can pass through the stormy winds; instead of becoming weaker, we become stronger and stronger. This living hope grows until it is fully realized in heaven. It makes us more and more hopeful as time goes by, no matter what happens around us. Apostle Paul said, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16).

I know a person in Asia named Angela. She had a painful childhood in a dysfunctional family. She felt inferior and useless. During her college days, she wanted to know the meaning of her life. She came to Bible study. The words of Genesis 12:2 spoke to her: "I will bless you...and you will be a blessing." She discovered God's love and great mission. This gave her a sense of dignity as a child of God. She had confidence in God to go to another country as a missionary. As she shared the gospel, students began to respond. So, she devoted herself to raising Jesus' disciples. Suddenly, she developed a brain disease. She needed multiple brain surgeries. The third time, she felt that she was dying. There seemed to be no hope. But she came to Jesus and found a living hope. She recovered from the brain disease and resumed her student ministry. Then God poured out his blessing on her abundantly. He raised professor shepherds, house churches, and missionaries through her who have spread all over Asia and to the world. When we have a living hope in Christ our lives become dynamic, and we can be a blessing to the world. God has given us a living hope! Praise be to God!

As we begin this new year, I want to hold this living hope in my heart. Recently, my elderly parents informed me that they would entrust their end-of-life care to my younger sister, not to me. They said, "Because you are not here." I have lived apart from them for more than four decades, though I am their only son. Honestly, I felt a sense of loss. But as I prayed, I remembered that they accepted the gospel I preached. The Lord gave me assurance that they would be in his kingdom forever. This living hope brightened my soul and gave me new strength and power. I believe that every problem in my heart can be solved by having living hope. I pray to hold this living hope in my heart in 2025 and to plant hope in the hearts of God's people.

Third, our lifestyle – how we should live (1:5-9; 13-16; 22-2:3; 2:11-17; 3:15-17; 4:7-13; 5:1-4). So far Peter has shared a heavenly perspective of our Christian lives. We are God’s elect! We have a living hope in Jesus! This empowers us to live a joyful Christian life. In the rest of his letter, Peter exhorts believers how we should live. Let’s consider some key teachings.

I) Rejoice in our sufferings (1:6-9). In the past, we tried to avoid suffering, regarding it as harmful and miserable. But with living hope in Jesus, we see that God uses suffering for our good. Through suffering, our false hopes are removed, and our faith is purified. Through suffering, we grow in perseverance and character (Ro 5:3-4). Through suffering, Christ’s glory is revealed in us (4:13). In Christ, suffering is for our good. Let’s arm ourselves with the right attitude toward suffering in the new year.

II) Be holy (1:15-16). 1:15-16 say: “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” The Lord wants us to be holy from the inside out, with a genuine quality of life that reflects his own holiness. This is what we desire most. Yet as we hear the words “be holy” we may cringe, knowing that we are sinners. But we can truly be holy by Jesus’ shed blood and the power of the Holy Spirit. Let’s accept God’s call to holiness and commit to growing in holiness.

III) Love one another deeply (1:22). Peter tells us to “love one another deeply from the heart.” As we grow in holiness, we can love one another with pure hearts. We can build up a community of love, respect, and trust. In such a community we can grow spiritually. The world sees that we are Jesus’ disciples. Let’s love one another deeply from the heart.

IV) Crave pure spiritual milk (1:23-2:3). To practice holy love, we need to grow spiritually. How? Peter encourages us: “...like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Newborn babies crave milk desperately. Likewise, let’s crave God’s word so that we may grow spiritually.

V). Share the reason for our hope (3:15). 3:15 says, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” As we live with hope, despairing people are surprised. How can you have hope? It is the golden opportunity to share Christ. We must give them a good answer that helps them come to Christ. To do so, we need to prepare gospel messages that are relevant and meaningful to the people around us. Let’s always be ready to share Christ!

Finally, be shepherds of God’s flock (5:1-4). The Apostle Peter exhorted leaders: “be shepherds of God’s flock.” It is a charge to live sacrificially to take care of God’s sheep. Many young people in the USA and around the world are desperate. They need hope. When we have the living hope in our hearts, we can plant hope in them no matter what their circumstances or condition. Hope can transform them into mighty people of God who influence the world with the gospel. Let’s be good shepherds who plant hope in people by teaching the Bible and sharing our testimonies.

Peter wrote this letter to the early Christians with a great vision that they were a royal priesthood. Though they lived on the bottom of society, despised and persecuted, they had a clear identity as God's chosen people and lived holy lives. They overcame all hardships and testified to Christ. What happened? History attests that the Roman Empire became Christendom. They were indeed world changers! Let's accept the living hope of Jesus in our hearts, live by his words, and be world changers in our times.

Prayer topics:

1. May 2025 be the year of living hope in Jesus.
2. With this hope, let's rejoice in our sufferings, be holy, love one another deeply, crave God's word, share the reason for our hope in Christ, and be shepherds of God's flock.
3. Hope in Christ may be planted in many young people in North America, and they may live as Jesus' disciples.