

How's Your Life Going? – 1 Peter 1:3-12

Peter was writing to a group of Christians in the First Century. Scattered around Asia Minor, they were going through a massive change. Marginalized in society; alienated from friends and family; outcasts from society and persecuted. As the Roman Empire colonised the area, they would deal with disruption by deporting those who disrupted the Roman way of life. Christians certainly disrupted the social norms, so many were deported. They didn't fully belong back home, but they don't belong in this new place either. Peter writes to these people. We can read some encouragement in this letter for ourselves as we face challenges and times of change.

1) How's Your Future? (vs 3-5)

Peter starts this letter to these homeless, persecuted outcasts with "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*" (v3). Knowing their suffering, what has happened to them because of their faith, this sounds insensitive. However, in the original text, Peter would have written one sentence (vs 3-5), which gives reason that they can praise God, despite their suffering. Though all hope may have appeared lost, with their circumstances out of their control, Peter reminds the church of the Living Hope guaranteed. Despite what the world provided, their future was secured. There are many things, that are good things, that we hope for. Good grades, relationships, friendships are not guaranteed. But there is a hope that we have that is guaranteed. What hope? "...a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (v5). The ultimate act of rescue from evil, decay and death.

How can we be sure we will receive this hope? Peter says it's '*kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*'. Not by anything we do, but by God's power. It is guaranteed by God alone, and we cannot lose that.

Q. What are you tempted to put your trust in? What hopes have let you down?

Q. How does the guaranteed hope that Jesus promises give strength when all else fails?

2) How are You Right Now? (vs 6-7)

The Living Hope Peter talks about doesn't ignore the suffering. It does not sugar-coat it with 'keep your chin up' or 'stay positive'. Peter recognises that suffering is tough. 'Grieves', 'trials', 'tested' and 'fire' are painful descriptions which the Christians in the Roman Empire would have associated with. Peter acknowledges the tough times, but knows that this is '*for a little while*' compared to the eternal hope.

Suffering can be made easier if we aren't loyal to Jesus. For the Christians in the Roman Empire, denying Jesus meant they could keep their homes. For us it can mean getting drunk, giving in to peer pressure, or jumping into a bad relationship amongst other things. Peter reminds them, and us, that through suffering and trials, our faith is proved genuine. Tested by the fire, it would be easy to take the easy way out. But the genuine faith holds onto Jesus, knowing that He is worth much more than the momentary relief. Our faithfulness under trial results in glory to God because it shows the world that He is enough. That means your life, your story, including your trials, are achieving something.

Q. Why is it tempting to sugar-coat and sweep away tough trials? How does Peter's acknowledgement of the tough times provide encouragement during difficult times?

Q. Do you have any stories of faithfulness during trial that inspire and encourage you?

3) How's Your Love? (vs 8-9)

It is important not to forget who we are walking through life with. As Christians, we love Jesus Christ, which is pretty odd considering we have not seen Him. But we believe in Him, and love Him. Not just an understanding of a historical man, but a relationship with the Living God. He gives meaning; He gives joy. Peter had seen Jesus; he had seen Jesus feed the five thousand; he had seen Jesus walk on water. Peter had reason to love Jesus. Others had seen Jesus perform the same miracles that Peter saw, yet did not love Him, following only after the miracles. Those he was writing to, like us, had not, yet they still loved Him.

Looking at our future, we can think about the hope ahead, our future inheritance, a time without suffering. Like a wedding, we can think about the food, the dancing and the music. But it means nothing without the bride and groom. When thinking about our suffering and our future hope, it means nothing without Jesus. All of it is pointless if it's not Jesus we are waiting to be with.

When everything is stripped away, when faced with those trials and struggles, you begin to notice how other things have taken place in your heart. It is a time to recognise what you are holding onto; a time to return to Jesus.

Q. If you could ask Jesus for anything, what would you ask? How would you feel if He said 'no'?

Q. What things try to take Jesus' place in your heart? What do you need to lay aside to make more room for Jesus?