

Victory of the Lamb – The Way of the Exile – 1 Peter 1

March 8, 2020 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Most of you know that one of my hobbies is long distance running. So, a week ago Saturday while many of you were partaking in your hobby, like a nerd I was watching the US Olympic Marathon Trials in Atlanta. It was a tough course with a lot of hills. As you can imagine running up a hill is not a tremendous task, it takes more energy and more training than running on a flat course. But what you may not realize is that running down hill is no piece of cake either. There is a lot of pounding on your body. So, the runners needed to train running up hills and down hills more than if they were running on a flat course. The runners acknowledge what was ahead of them.

We, too, must acknowledge what is right in front of us. In the series that we are beginning today, *The Way of the Exile*, we want to acknowledge the course that is ahead of us. We are no longer living on a flat course. There are going to be ups and downs, both of which are tough, but there is hope and in fact there is joy and glory ahead.

So let's get a little background info and jump in on what the rest of your life is going to look like. 1 Peter 1: **Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.** The writer of this letter is one of Jesus' followers named Peter. The Peter who declared that Jesus was the Messiah, the Peter who walked on water, and then who had to be rescued by Jesus, the Peter who told Jesus he would never fall away from him, the Peter who actually did deny Jesus three times, the Peter who was reinstated by Jesus after his resurrection, the Peter who started numerous churches, the Peter who Church history says that not long after he wrote this letter he would die by upside down crucifixion.

The original audience is the exiles scattered through the provinces of present-day Turkey. These exiles are Jewish and Gentile Christians that have been deported, displaced forcibly by the Roman Emperor Nero and now reside in various parts of Turkey. They are there, but they don't belong there. They are sojourners, immigrants by force, aliens. They are disenfranchised and excluded from their family and the customs they were used to. They are outsiders, ethnically, nationally, and religiously. They are persecuted by their employers and by their neighbors. There are restrictions on where they could live, the people they could marry. They paid higher taxes and faced greater civil punishments. They are at the mercy of merciless. Their life was full of suffering. They knew that Christianity would be full of conflict with the sinful world.

For some of us, we grew up in a very different time, a time of cultural Christianity. It was a flat course. It was easy to be a Christian and to follow Jesus if no other reason than everybody else was doing it. For some of us the biggest religious suffering issue we faced was from other Christians on Sunday mornings. If you were Lutheran, you hoped your worship service ended before the Catholics or you were going to have to wait for brunch and vis a versa. The struggle was real.

But our culture has changed from culturally Christian to nominally Christian to post Christian. Have you ever felt like an exile, like you didn't belong? Maybe it was in a college classroom when the professor made some derisive comment about God creating the world. Or when your friends reasoned that all religions are basically the same. Maybe it's when courts and states are trying to redefine marriage. Or TV shows that openly mock Christianity. Maybe it is when you decided to read your Bible at lunch time

or listen to Christian music on Spotify and your co-workers gave the impression of “oh you are one of those.” Maybe you even feel like an exile in your own home. Maybe it was when you wondered if it was safe to share your faith in Jesus.

We need to acknowledge Christians do get oppressed and do get persecuted. According to a study on Anglican Communion News Service that I read this past week (actual publish date May 10, 2019), Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the entire world. Of all the people being persecuted for the religious beliefs throughout the world, 80% are Christian. We need to acknowledge this is a part of being a follower of Christ. This is what has happened for most followers of Jesus throughout most of history.

For some of us it is hard. We are grieving the loss of cultural Christianity. It's not how it used. It is not how I dreamed it would be. Have you ever watched the news or read a story or saw a post and said, “what is the world coming to?” We fear for our kids and for their kids. And if we aren't careful, we can fall into the woe is me mode. And just get angry or give up. Where is hope?

Our world says we can have hope in progress. Progress in science, medicine, technology. Progress in politics, if we can just get our candidate in the White 'House, we can move forward. Right now, the scramble is on to find a cure for the Corona virus. And I don't doubt that we will. But have you noticed that every time we do come up with a cure for something, there is another something that catches us unprepared. And the overall death rate for our population is still at 100%.

Our world says we can have hope through escapism. Escape from all this mess. Do your own thing. Your Story is the STORY. Experience everything you can before it is gone. And the other form of escapism is drug abuse.

How do you and I live in times of persecution and suffering and grief? Where is the hope?

The story of Christianity is not about progress or escapism, **Christianity is about the resurrection**. It is about **living hope**. 1 Peter 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**, Here is the deal about Christianity - Jesus is alive. Jesus is living hope.

This hope is not like, “I hope it doesn't rain.” “I hope I don't have to wait in line.” This is just wishful thinking that we don't know if it will happen or not. But Biblical hope, living hope, is confidence in God's promises because we can trust in the character of God.

Living Hope is based on the work of Jesus. In virtually every one of our worship services we talk about the work of Jesus in the forgive us, renew us, lead us section. Where Jesus led a perfect life for us, died an innocent death in our place and was raised to life and sits at the right hand of God in victory. And so, he defeated sin, death, and Satan. And because that is true, death is not the end of the story for us. You have living hope: **you who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:** because Jesus has washed away our sins through his blood poured out on the cross our relationship with God is sure and certain: **into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you**, Jesus is telling us all the work has already been done for you, I give you inheritance, rights, privileges citizenship. It's all done. Verse 9 says, **you are receiving the end result of your faith**,

the salvation of your souls. Salvation is already ours. We can't earn it because it is already paid for by mercy. We can't unearn it, because it is ours by grace.

Sometimes we stop there – but because Jesus is a living hope there is more. **Living Hope is based on the person of Jesus.** When we pray, we are not just speaking into the wind, listening to our own thoughts, we are talking to him. And not only can we talk to him, but he understands even when we are going through suffering and grief. Isaiah 53: **He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.** He knows what it is like to be despised, rejected, suffer, be in pain, held in low esteem.

Psalms 23 says of Jesus that his rod and his staff comfort us. If his rod and staff are here, so is he! He can walk with us through the pain and suffering. And teach us how to live in a world in which we feel like we don't belong. And even more Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to us who is working in our hearts to help us be patient in suffering, loving in the middle of persecution, at peace in the middle of corruption. You see, we don't have mind over matter psychology, we have living hope in Jesus. In his work, in his person and in his promise.

Living Hope is based on the promises of Jesus. One of the promises that you can claim and make your own today, is this: (Hebrews 13:5) **“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.”** You are with Jesus and you are always going to be with Jesus. The promise of salvation is sure because it is not based on our works, our character, but based on God's work and God's character. Jesus is coming back. And when he comes back everything broken is going to be fixed, everything hurting is going to be healed. Every question is going to be answered. Jesus has an inheritance for you that is greater than winning the lottery, PCH sweepstakes, a penthouse in Time Square. Peter is telling you to speak out loud the promises of God, know that you have victory!

And one day we will have glory. Glory that you and I haven't seen before. Glory that makes winning a Olympic gold medal inconsequential. Peter says it is going to be like this – suffering then glory. Just like Jesus, suffering then glory. (1 Peter 1:7) **These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.** Suffering actually can refine you and make you pure so that your hope is not in something or someone other than God.

And when we are in that glory, there is no going back to the former corrupt and painful ways of life. It is all good. This inheritance, this glory, can never spoil, perish or fade away. It will not lose its luster, its value, its joy, its completeness. It will never get old or boring. It is glory everlasting. There will be no weeping, no pain, no bills, no taxes, no disappointment, no fake news, no hysteria, no pandemics. (Romans 8:18) **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.**

So if you are not suffering, this is pretty cool message. But if you are suffering, then maybe it is hard to hear. Some of you are a time of suffering, of pain, of grief, spiritual attack, lost jobs, family strife, court battles, praying for years for something to happen and it hasn't yet. But I want you to know the Lord sees you, he cares for you, he is walking a long side of you, Jesus is saying well done even though you don't see me you love me.

Fix your Hope on Jesus. Your hope determines your future. If I am running a marathon, 26.2 miles and I hope that I will make it to the top of the hill at mile 2, I am probably not going to make it the other 24 plus miles. If you are just hoping to make it through this one trial, you are selling God short. He has so much more in store for you.

And so, we have suffering, grief. We can praise God in the storm because the storm doesn't define us; Jesus is living hope with us in the storm. We can rejoice because the storm doesn't have the last word. Jesus does. And Jesus is rescuing us for glory.