



Sermon
16th April 2023
2nd Sunday of Easter

Hope, Shield and Joy
1 Peter 1:3-9; Acts 2:14a, 22-32
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Introduction

Last Sunday was of course Easter and we heard the account of the women finding the tomb empty, encountering the angel who told them that Jesus is risen and then meeting Jesus himself. Today's reading gospel reading continues the history of those first encounters with the risen Lord. Normally, our attention is taken by the drama of the disciples being locked in the Upper Room and Jesus appearing in the room, eating with them and assuring them that he was alive in a solid body. We hear of Thomas' disbelief and Jesus meeting them again seven days later to prove to Thomas that he is alive in a real body. Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."¹

While this is the compelling story which grips our attention, I want us to notice what else we are being given. Through these weeks of the Easter season running through to Pentecost, we are offered a significant window into the teaching and preaching of the Apostle Peter. Instead of Old Testament readings in this season, we have readings from the Book of Acts. Last week, it was his summary of the earthly ministry of Jesus when he was preaching to Cornelius' household. For these next three weeks we are working through his first sermon on the day of Pentecost when he explained the crucifixion and resurrection to his hearers. Meanwhile the Epistle readings follows his first Epistle.

In the Road to Emmaus account, we hear that Jesus explained to those two disciples what the Old Testament said concerning him, his crucifixion and resurrection.² I used to wish that we knew the detail of what Jesus he said. Then some years ago, I realised that we do know. Luke records in Acts 1:3:

"After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

Jesus explained these things to his disciples and we see in their preaching, they relayed his words. So to hear what Peter preached about the resurrection at that early time and later wrote to the church when it was suffering persecution is significant for us as we reflect on the resurrection.

Let's start with the Acts passage where Luke recorded Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. Peter shows extraordinary boldness. Just 53 days before he was afraid of a serving girl saying that he might be a follower of Jesus because he had a Galilean accent, now he confronts his audience in Jerusalem. Jesus had been accredited to them by God through his miracles – and not only miracles but wonders and signs as well! There was clear proof that he was the Messiah through these divine powers yet they had handed him over to be killed. But he tells them God raised Jesus to life and they, the disciples, are witnesses of it.

Here he shows this was prophesied in Psalm 16 – so this is one of the scriptures which Jesus had explained to them. In Psalm 16, Peter explains that David was prophetically giving words about the Messiah, that he would not be abandoned to the grave and his body would not decay. Peter points out that David had died and been buried. His tomb was nearby – the Psalm was not referring to David but to one of his descendants, the Messiah. While his listeners might boggle at the idea of the Messiah dying and rising again, see, there it was written in their scriptures.

¹ John 20:29

² Luke 24:27

1st Peter

As we move on to Peter's words in his epistle, we find he is speaking about the fruit of the resurrection in our lives. He says there is a hope, an inheritance, a shield and a joy.

Hope

"He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."³

The resurrection of Jesus is the basis for hope. The expectancy of a resurrection body; the expectancy of full salvation; the expectancy of dwelling with God.

Edmund Clowney writes, "Peter writes of a sure hope, a hope that holds the future in the present because it is anchored in the past. Peter hopes for God's salvation, God's deliverance from sin and death. His hope is sure, because God has already accomplished his salvation in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."⁴

Do you get that? You have to get your head around that don't you? We have a hope that holds the future in the present because it is anchored in the past. Because of the past event of the resurrection, we have a sure hope now in the present. And hope always looks to the future. Without the resurrection, there would be little basis for that hope.

Inheritance

Peter says "God has given us new birth ... into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you."⁵

The wealth of this world can easily lose value. Valuable items perish or spoil. But Peter tells us that God's true wealth for us is kept safe and secure. It is imperishable.

Shield

Then in verse 5: You "... through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." God provides the shield for us. It is provided by his power – the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Our part is to connect to the shield by our faith or trust. Incidentally, don't think that is odd or tough. All shields need you to trust them. If you don't hold them up or stand behind them they can't work. So not only is there a hope and an inheritance in the future but we are protected now by God's power. That doesn't mean it is all a bed of roses. There are trials and sufferings to go through. There is a war between God and Satan. We cannot expect to be left always on the sidelines. But we have that promise of protection and furthermore the trials we go through test and prove the reality of the trust we have in Him.

Peter likens that testing to the refining of gold. Gold is refined by fire. The goldsmith heats it in a crucible to a high temperature and all the impurities mixed in with it at burnt off leaving the pure gold. And he notes that our faith is more valuable than gold and more enduring. In the inheritance he is referring to, the streets are paved with gold, but faith is the currency. Gold is like stone, but faith is the valuable commodity. Our faith is more enduring because these elements will be destroyed, and a new heaven and earth created. Our faith will persist to that realm – mere gold will be destroyed.

Joy

Peter has written of the hope, the inheritance, the shield - and then the joy:

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."⁶

³ 1 Peter 1:3

⁴ Clowney E., 1988, *BST: The Message of 1 Peter*, IVP Leicester, P44

⁵ 1 Peter 1:4

⁶ 1 Peter 1:8-9

Belief without Seeing

That reminds us of Jesus' words to Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."⁷

Friends, we are among the great company of those who have not seen but have believed. Jesus says, we are blessed. Peter says that as we love him and believe in him we are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. Why? because we are receiving the salvation of our souls.

But maybe you are one who does not yet believe, you have the potential to be a believer. In the last verse of the gospel reading, John wrote that he recorded these things so that we may believe and have life in Jesus' name. The same can be said for Peter as he spoke and wrote of Jesus to tell people what he had seen, experienced and heard – the intention is that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name. Are you ready to put your faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour? Do approach me after the service if you want to go further with that.

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance-- an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad!⁸

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⁷ John 20:29

⁸ 1 Peter 1:3-6 NLT