

*SCC Message April 26, 2020 (Ben Stobbe)*

## **TRUSTING GOD DURING TRIALS**

Good morning everyone. Last Sunday Gerald spoke on the 1<sup>st</sup> of several verses from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter chapter 1. He spoke of hope in the context of our eternal life. He mentioned that hope shifts as circumstances change, and noted that in this time of the pandemic, everywhere around us there are people looking for hope. As believers we not only have these hopes but we also have a blessed new hope. *And with the knowledge of this blessed new hope, we must focus on making changes in our attitudes and actions to reflect in our lives this new hope, made possible by Christ's resurrection.*

Today I will speak to trusting God during trials. This is what Peter was writing about in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. After this review I will compare Peter's advice to the advice we are receiving when dealing with the trials we are currently undergoing in the Covid crisis.

Starting at 1 Peter 1:13, Peter begins to point out the basic implications of this life of hope. He illustrates a coming transition by using the word "therefore." He gives the sense of urgency when he says, "be ready, and be sober". Being sober means to be clear minded, or to exercise self-control. Confused thinking is equated with drunkenness. And what are we to be thinking clearly about? Peter says here in verse 13 and throughout the letter that the central object of this hope is grace, the love gift of God. Peter says this will become even more evident us when Christ is revealed at his coming. Therefore we have every reason to look forward to the future with confidence. As one commentator said, "We can have assurance that in God's hand, life has a wonderful purpose." It is almost as though Peter begins this letter looking at the end of our lives when we can share in Christ's eternal glory. But Peter also wants us not to ignore what we do in our immediate lives. As Gerald stated, "What we do now is important; our current life is not a waste of time, all is not forgotten". Key point in this section is that the resurrection of Christ has changed everything. Now life will be different for these new Christians that Peter is addressing. Therefore we have to change our behaviour. Now he

gives exhortations or directions that we should follow, to make real this hope for eternal life.

With good clear thinking and confidence in God's grace we are asked to change our life style. Peter immediately reminds us that in undergoing this change we start out as children, and more accurately and most importantly, obedient children. God is our father and every believer goes through this new birthing process.

Obedience is critical in Peter's message. Obedience protects you from your past – when you accepted and fulfilled evil desires. I love that description in Romans 12:2 “Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. This is what you must do to avoid being ignorant. Ignorance implies that you do not know how to behave.

What Peter is asking is that we raise our level of self-awareness, that we do a critical analysis of our own behaviour. Focus on your own actions not just on the actions of others. I believe self-awareness is connected to our conscience, which prompts us to behave in a way that was developed in us from earlier teaching. Following your conscience doesn't seem to be a popular teaching in our culture anymore. It would seem to be restrictive, controlling, and leading to guilt.. But friends, it doesn't need to be that way. Combining our total focus on Christ, together with his grace appreciated in our lives, results in the foundation for our own personal ethical behaviour.

The outcome of this personal self-awareness in our lifestyle is that it becomes holy living. Peter here quotes an OT passage from Leviticus, “Be Holy because I am holy.” It is striving to become like God, who is our mentor. Peter may have also picked up this thought from the words of Jesus which we find at the end of Matthew 5 where he speaks of loving your enemies and where Jesus concludes his lesson by saying “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect”. If you are using self-control guided by your conscience, and develop a sense of self-awareness, then holiness is the behavioural outcome. This is an expression of your new life in Christ, but should not be confused by a suggestion that you can attain salvation by good works. .. It is only when we really understand that we as

children of God must live holy lives; not as favourites but as thankful people who live in appreciation in the knowledge that our Lord died and rose again to give us the abundant life that we have. God is a mentor of holy living. To be like him we strive to do what is God-honoring and God-pleasing.

Lest we get too confident and possibly complacent in our changed behaviour Peter is also reminding us that in this world we should live as foreigners in reverent fear. After all our father God, is an impartial judge who can discern our motives. And we as children learn best by having a sense of reverence, wonder and awe of our heavenly father. As believers we are on a journey of discovery and every step we take brings us closer to the hope that is set before us.

Our new found freedom from past evil desires and ignorant living did not come cheaply. We cannot measure the cost of that freedom by using common currency which comes and goes, and often loses value. I was in Ukraine when their currency, the grievna, went from 5 grievna to one US dollar to 25 grievna for one US dollar. The banks were closed and yet hundreds stood in line waiting to take out cash. Our redemption was not done by the exchange of money. It was the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross and His rising from the dead. The death on the cross fulfilled the Passover requirement of a lamb without blemish or defect. The resurrection of Christ is absolutely fundamental to the Christian belief and life. This sacrifice was not some last minute plan by God. It was already prepared by the all-knowing God before the creation of the world. All of this was planned for our sake. And herein lies our faith and our hope. Faith is defined by commentators as a trust relationship that binds us to Christ while hope connects our trust to our future. Knowing this governs how we act.

Up until now Peter has outlined what we need to do and how to change our behaviour in light of the resurrection of Christ. These acts of self-awareness, of letting go of the past, deal with our personal behaviour. All of this obedience has led to our own purification. But this is not just for our own benefit. Now he turns the page and states how these changes impact our relationship with others.

Peter says these changes give us a new sense of sincerity, or authenticity. Now when we meet fellow believers who also have undertaken similar changes to their

behaviour we have a deeper relationship. Our love for each other is more sincere, more authentic, and it truly comes from the heart.

Once we understand this, we can go to our sisters and brothers in Christ's holy family, not as being better, but as people who give and share sincere love. Now we have confidence that we are all in the same family of God. Our styles and personalities differ but our commonality of being recipients of God's mercy and grace is the framework that keeps us together. We can trust God and serve each other because of the resurrection of Christ. As Christians we all share a common experience and remind each other of that when we celebrate communion. Remember Peter was writing this letter to relatively new Christians who were living in a time of change and fear. Now more than ever they needed be reminded that the death and resurrection of Christ was the glue that would hold them together in these difficult times.

Knowing Peter's response to trusting God during trials we can now compare Peter's advice on the need to change our behaviour to what we are hearing from the COVID experts.

Both Peter and the COVID experts say that we need to change our behaviour. The challenges we face are so significant that we can't continue in our past pattern of living.

COVID experts say be rational in making decisions and stay at home. Peter says think clearly and exercise self-control. COVID experts say we do not need to stay at home forever, but we need to accept scientific research in understanding COVID. Peter says our minds must always be alert with clear thinking. There is no time limit on this.

Our politicians keep reminding us that while immediate changes of behaviour are needed, eventually we be able to go back to our normal pre-COVID lives. Here Peter is adamantly different. For children of God who celebrate the risen Christ and look forward to the return of Christ to this earth it would be disastrous to go back to our old way of living.

Peter's message of God paying a ransom to save us from our empty life is found throughout scripture. The payment was not in any currency but in the death of his son on the cross. Understanding what Christ has done for us should prompt us to change our behaviour. What I am about to say is not a comparative statement but we certainly do hear of health care workers who have given their lives in this Covid time. This certainly speaks of their commitment to their calling and their willingness to risk their health and lives for others. And if they have this level of dedication for our benefit, it is not asking too much for us to change our behaviours to help protect them and their families.

We are frequently reminded that this virus will not last forever. We can hope for a better future even though it is hard to imagine that sometimes. However, Peter reminds us that we can place our eternal hope in God. We have a priceless hope which includes a new heaven and a new earth. We will share in God's eternal glory. Herein lies our future.

David's words from Psalm 116:3 where he writes "the cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow" is the experience of so many. Finally, what a relief it must be to hear a nurse say, "you are free of the deadly virus". For many who have suffered much with the illness, these must be words they never thought they would hear.

But David doesn't stop at distress and sorrow when he says in the next verse, "Then I called on the name of the Lord: Lord save me! The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion." In addition to hearing that you are free from the deadly virus isn't it wonderful to know that we are also free from our sins and chains of bondage. After living under the threat of death because of a COVID infection or living in a life of sin and separation from God we all want to be free. For Christians it means to be free to serve the God that rescued us.

My friends even though we all feel under stress and trial we truly live in a fortunate time when we not only have the best of health care but also the assurance this life is not our only life. We see death differently, not as the end but the beginning of new life, life given to us by the one who died that we might live.

This is our challenge. In all this turmoil and change we must live holy lives that reflect the risen Christ.