

Today we're going to be talking about faith, and "What sort of faith, is a genuine faith."

At the heart of our faith – at the heart of what Disciples of Jesus believe, is this thing called "Salvation"... But what are we talking about, when we're talking about "salvation"?

When we talk about salvation, often in the Christian church, we talk a lot about "What we've been saved **from**". We've been saved from sin; or (more particularly), we often talk about being saved from the consequences of sin:

- Judgment;
- Hell
- Damnation;
- eternal torment;

(At least, back in the day, we used to talk about being saved from such things)

But in our current more politically correct and less offensive culture, many preachers are reluctant to talk about things like these sorts of things,, and so more often today, salvation is being presented in terms of being saved from:

- Past hurt (stuff that somebody's done to me [not my fault])
- Brokenness (and I can be made whole again);
Abrogates all personal responsibility...; and
- One of the favourite things we like to be saved from now, is "addictions". "Come and be saved from your addictions"

And it's all a matter of language, but language is important because of what it conveys:

Over the last couple of decades, we've had it drummed into us that addiction is a disease that people suffer from... And so, "If it's a disease, then I'm not responsible – it's just unfortunate that I caught this disease, and I can be saved from it..."

But a Gospel truth, is that none of us can be saved, unless we have a very personal repentance of our own personal sin against God, and our own personal rebellion by breaking His Righteous Law... My sin, was all entirely my fault – it's nobody else's... I can't blame it on my circumstances/parents/society/genetic makeup...

Our utter sinfulness, goes to the very core of who we are... Which is why the only way for us to be saved, is to be "born again"....

The Greek word here, that we translate as "born again", is ἀναγεννήσας (anagennēsas), which means "re-generation" – to be born anew...

In order to be saved to become something that is beautiful and pure and holy, first we have to come to the realisation that we are rotten to the core, and that we need to be born anew...

Alright, so that's what we're saved from – we're saved from sin – we're saved from what we once were...

But in our Bible reading for today, where Peter is talking about “Salvation”, he’s not talking so much about what we’ve been saved **from** – he’s highlighting what we are being saved **to**....

In the Christian church, we all come from different backgrounds/upbringings/experiences... But the thing that we have in common, is what we are saved to...

V³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

We have been saved to a living hope.

You know, some folk have the attitude “I don’t mind if he gets a bit of religion, just as long as he doesn’t become one of those ‘born again’ Christians”... But there is no other kind.

Unless our faith is genuine – Unless we have been re-generated (born again), there is no living hope. And if there is no **living** hope, there is only false hope, which is a dead hope...

But through Jesus Christ, who has been raised from the dead, we (by faith) have been re-generated – we have been born again, to a living hope...

So, what does ‘living hope’ look like??? Well, the thing is, It’s wonderful; glorious; amazing,,, but in our society, it may not be the sort of hope that most people are looking for.

Now that I'm old and (and certifiably old because I'm a grandpa), I can say, "In all my years...", and so I am going to say that... In all my years in the Christian church, I've observed many people who have come to church, to kick the tyres of Christianity, because they have an immediate need/problem in their physical life, that they want to have fixed..

And they come to church "I'll give this Christianity thing a go"... They might be:

- Sick
- Marriage problems;
- Depression / anxiety;
- Lonely....

And they turn up at church, with a hope that their problems are all going to be magically cured, and they're going to enjoy their life a whole lot more, and that's the hope that they have – that's the hope that they're looking for... - to fix their immediate physical life, and make it more pleasurable for them...

And you know what? – When we are truly born again, many of our problems **will** be fixed,

- when we give our lives over to Jesus, and
- repent of our sin;
- selfishness;
- our old way of life/doing things... And
- when we begin to live God's way (where we are no longer centre of our lives, and God is)...

many of our problems will be fixed...

But the thing is, that's not what most people are looking for – most people are looking for a quick repair of their life circumstances, without having to go through a true re-generation of being born again...

And the expectation that everything's going to go so much better for them (once they start going to church / get a bit of religion into them), just doesn't work out as they'd hoped...

And today, there are so many churches who are preaching a gospel (often a false gospel) that promises all sorts of physical blessings now...

But when Peter described the living hope of a genuine faith, he wasn't describing something which is immediate – he's describing something that we look forward to...

It's an **inheritance**... An inheritance isn't something that we want to rush, is it... An inheritance is something which we don't earn, and it comes at a time which we don't determine, and while we look forward to it, we don't yet have it...

It's **imperishable**... It's not something that will:

- go-off like a piece of fruit;
- go stale like chocolate cake;
- rust like a motor car;
- fall into a shambles like a mansion...

It's imperishable – it lasts forever...

It's **undefiled**... It's pure. It's moral. It won't corrupt us...

It's **unfading**... *Robyn had her 50th birthday a bit over a month ago, and on her birthday cake, was a little arrangement/possie of flowers, that the florist put together for her... Apparently it's very beautiful (I don't notice such things),,, And these flowers have been cluttering up our fridge ever since...*

Apparently my wife's husband rarely gives her flowers, and she wants to be able to enjoy them for as long as she can...

But even so, in a few months' time, those flowers will have faded, and this thing of beauty will become compost...

And isn't that the way that so many things in life go... We have our heart set on something, and we save up for it, and we work for it, and we long for it,,, and we get it, and we enjoy it,,, but there comes a time when it's faded...:

- flowers become compost;
- the family photo on the wall fades;
- the shiny new car doesn't shine anymore;
- the beautiful puppy gets old and shaggy...

But the living hope we look forward to, never fades...

And Peter says that it's **kept in heaven for you**, ⁵ who by **God's power** are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Our living hope, that we're looking forward to, is everlasting, and **this** is our salvation – **this** is what we are saved to... ...
Is it something that I get straight away??? No... It will be revealed in the last time.

When Jesus returns, all things will be made new – there will be a new heaven and a new earth... And those who have been re-generated (born again), will be with Jesus in glory, forever...

Now, Peter says something interesting here: We are being guarded through faith for this salvation that will be revealed... guarded through faith – Sounds like safety, doesn't it... But as we read on, we realise that “God guarding us”, doesn't necessarily mean that we will be kept physically safe, in fact far from it...

Because of this faith that we have, in this world, we will suffer... And we talked about this a couple of weeks ago – how at that time that this was written, Christians were suffering terribly under the persecutions of Nero ...

- Some were covered in skins of wild animals and he'd set his hunting dogs onto them;
- Many were crucified;
- Some he used as garden lighting – as the sun went down, he would coat them in tar/pitch, and he'd set them on fire, to burn through the night...
- And even Peter himself, we understand, would later be crucified upside down...

God's power, was guarding their faith... And because of their faith, through all of the persecutions, they could continue to rejoice.

You see, hope should lead to joy.

What does true joy look like???

I get tired of when hyped-up exuberance gets presented as an expression of joy in the lord.... Do you know what I'm talking about???

Some church traditions try to generate a pretend atmosphere of joy and woohoo! in a church (*the same sort of ecstatic exuberance that can be observed in many football stadiums and rock-concerts*).... And if you take away:

- the main entertainer – they joy lessens;
- the musicians – lost and don't know how to worship;
- lighting and (God-forbid) lose the smoke machine...

the rejoicing atmosphere tends to fade...

True joy – to rejoice, isn't about trying to conjure up that sort of feeling. And true joy doesn't try to hide or deny the present suffering we're going through...ⁱ

True joy, recognises (that in the context of eternity), our present sufferings only go on for a little while, but our inheritance in Christ Jesus, is assured, and it's eternal... And in this we rejoice...

You see, this is where the rubber hits the road... Is our faith truly genuine???

Is my faith the sort of faith that causes me to rejoice, even through sufferings & trials & persecutions? Or is my rejoicing, dependant on 'atmosphere'?

And if you were put in the position of the Christians in Rome – “Denounce Jesus, or I’m going to set you on fire to light my garden.” ... Or if you were put in the position (a few years ago) of Christians in the Middle East, when ISIS said “Convert to Islam, or we will cut the heads off your children...” ...

Is our faith such, that we would choose “Not to deny Jesus”???

Peter recognises that persecution is where our faith either stands or it falls. This is where our faith is proved genuine... He says:

⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In 2 weeks time, Robyn and I will have been married for 28 years. But I’m starting to think that if Jesus doesn’t come back in the next couple of decades, I’m going to have to get her another wedding ring... Her pure gold wedding ring, is wearing away. I guess mine is too, but it’s actually an alloy, so it’s not quite as soft...

But we know, that out of all of the metals, part of the value of gold, is the fact that it doesn’t tarnish – it doesn’t oxidise, and so it lasts and lasts and lasts... Even if you throw it in the fire, it melts and changes form, but it’s still gold... And gold is

very precious... At the moment, gold is at a record high price.
~ \$2700/oz.

Now here's the thing... **Physically**, gold is forever, isn't it...
And fire doesn't destroy it – fire refines gold. But even gold
will perish... The most precious/pure/lasting metal, will
perish.

You know the saying, “You can't take your money with
you”... It's very true... But even though we know that, we
still like to store up money for our children to inherit... But
there will come a time, when Jesus returns in all of His glory,
and the old Earth will pass away... And all of what that
entails (including the gold) – it will all pass away...
Everything that is physical, will perish...

But Peter is saying, that there is something that will not
perish... Genuine Faith will **not** perish, even if it **is** tested by
fire... “Even if Nero turns us into a garden light”, our faith
(that is tested) will be found to be genuine, and it will not
perish... That sort of faith will **result in praise and glory**
and honour when Jesus appears ...

You see, this is genuine faith...
You haven't seen Jesus, (have you?).. Do you love Him???
Of course you do, and the world thinks you're crazy – that
your most important life choices – and in fact, your whole life,
revolves around this bloke, Jesus, who you haven't even
seen... Why would you do that??? Faith!!! You haven't seen
Him, and yet you love Him...

And even though now, we can't yet see Jesus, and even though at times, it seems that evil may be triumphing,,,,, we believe in Him, don't we????

That, my friends, is genuine faith. Hebrews 11:1 (NIV84)
Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

That's what genuine faith is, and here, Peter describes it like this:

you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

The outcome of our faith, isn't so much about physical blessings now (although in God's mercy and Sovereignty, he may grant us some of these blessings now)... But the promise that we eagerly anticipate (our living hope), is the **outcome** of our faith – a faith that looks beyond what this life has to offer – the salvation of our souls...

You know, this takes a completely different mind-set...

And perhaps it's because our lives are **not** currently at risk for following Jesus,,, that we become so focused on this life, and so focused on our needs (or more-so, our wants) in this life... And we strive and aim to make **this life** glorious...

But genuine faith:

- stands the test.
- It looks beyond this life, in the eager expectation of the salvation of our souls;
- And genuine faith expresses itself in love for Jesus... If I don't seriously love Jesus more than anything else, my faith isn't genuine;

I've thought a lot about this (over the last couple of weeks) – about genuine faith...

Even Christians describe unbelievers as “Oh, they've got a faith – they know there's something in it...” and I think that's our way of saying “They're close – they're nearly there”... *But I reckon that's about as close as standing on the southern shores of Victoria, and looking across Bass Straight, and saying “I'm not in Tasmania yet, but I'm nearly there...”*

Faith isn't faith until it's genuine. And hope isn't a living hope, until it's genuine...

What Peter wrote here, was an enormous encouragement to the suffering church... They had the living hope... They had been re-generated – born anew, and they eagerly anticipated the appearing of Jesus...

And for some of us today, this same message, is an enormous encouragement for us too...

But maybe for you, it may have presented more of a **challenge**, than an encouragement. (I'm not actually sure I have the living hope that he's talking about)...

I guess the question is, "What will we do with that challenge???" What kind of salvation am I looking for??? Am I looking for something to enhance my life? And so if everything's going really well, I'll praise God???

Or am I looking to have my life re-generated – to be born anew, and I eagerly anticipate the appearing of Jesus and the salvation of my soul...

Because that's genuine faith, and it's a living hope.

And I'd invite you now, if you don't yet have that genuine faith/living hope, to surrender your life to Jesus, to be born again.

Let's Pray.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Heavenly Father, how wonderful You are;
How merciful You are.

Lord, I recognise that my life doesn't merely need a few enhancements – I need a rebirth.

And so Lord, I repent of my sin;

And I confess to You, I have sinned against You, in so many ways.

It wasn't anyone else's fault – it was entirely my own...

I have been so self-centred;

I have been so fixated on this life;

And even on the blessings of this life;

But Lord, I want to thank You for the living hope:

That when Jesus appears,

That we will attain the outcome of genuine faith;

The salvation of our souls...

Lord, we love you;

Even though we can't see You,

we love you with our whole being.

And we rejoice.

And Lord, we pray for strength.

Lord we pray for strength for Christians in this world,

Who are suffering for You;

- North Korea;
- Afghanistan;
- India;
- China;

- Iran;
- Turkey
- Kenya;
- Many other places...

For all who suffer for Your Name's sake.

Lord, we pray that You would keep them strong,
And that You would give them an inexpressible joy,
As they endure the trials, and their faith is proved
genuine.

And Lord, we pray for ourselves,
That when tested, our faith would also be proved
genuine,
To Your Glory,
In Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ Davids, Peter H. 1990. The New International Commentary on the New Testament – The First Epistle of Peter. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids. P.55