

Dual Citizenship

SCOTT HOEZEE

Do you ever wish you could recapture some stunning moment from your past? Maybe it is the thrill of your first kiss or the overwhelming joy at the birth of your first child. Or maybe it is, as the old hymn puts it, the thrill of the hour you first believed the Gospel. Sometimes we wish we could recapture those experiences, but it may be enough that we remember them; especially when things are tough. Today on *Groundwork* we are going to see how the Apostle Peter helps suffering Christians remember the truth of what they first believed as a way to forge ahead during the tough times of discipleship that come later.

MEG JENISTA

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Along with Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, I am Meg Jenista.

DAVE BAST

And we are looking at 1 Peter and the theme of Christian suffering in this series of programs, and we want to get right to it now, from Chapter 1:3-7:

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. ⁴And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In all this, you greatly rejoice; although now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Can I get an amen?

Scott Hoezee/

MEG JENISTA

Amen!

SCOTT HOEZEE

What is interesting here is in the span of just those four or five verses you just read, Dave, you get Peter encouraging almost kind of a binocular vision, where you can zoom in and you can zoom out. On the one hand, we can look to heaven and we realize there is an inheritance there – it is already real – but, closer to home, we zoom the binoculars the other way, we see what is right in front of us as well; and sometimes what is right in front of us is not so wonderful; we suffer; and we need somehow to keep both of those things going at the same time as believers. We look up, but we also look around, and we need to somehow find a way to make the connection between the two.

MEG JENISTA

I especially like the way that this paragraph in 1 Peter works to encourage its original audience, as well as us, to see beyond the circumstances. Craig Barnes talks about the pastor as minor poet, but really, any Christian being the minor poet who is able to not just read the words on the page, but is able to read what is lying underneath the surface of those; that as Christians we are constantly called to ask the question of where God is at work and how God is present in the midst of our lives, and that for powerless people, being able to see

God at work under the surface is actually an empowerment as they move forward in their lives.

DAVE BAST

Well, and he is talking here about heaven. Lately I think we have kind of shied away, almost, from talk of heaven. It does sound so sort of quaint, doesn't it; sort of 19th Century? And we have rightly focused on the new creation and the renewal of the heavens and the earth and all of that, which is God's ultimate plan; but meanwhile, there is such a thing – Peter describes it as our inheritance. It is what we get when we become children of God; when we are born again; when we are transformed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and it is real, and God is keeping it for us. He uses these three beautiful words, all negatives. It is hard to say exactly what heaven will be, but Peter says what it will not be. It is imperishable. It is not going to go away or be spoiled. It is unfading. It is not like a flower that is beautiful for a while and then withers and dies.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and we do not have it yet. It is an inheritance, but the good news is, nothing that happens to us here can get rid of it, right? So, it is not your 401K that some Bernie Madoff type could steal from you. It is not going to go up and down with the stock market or depending on the circumstances of your life. We do not have it yet. We cannot grab hold of it, but nothing on this earth – or anywhere else, for that matter – can touch it; and that is the living hope. It is not going to go away no matter what happens.

MEG JENISTA

And it reminds us, too, of the prophet, John, in the book of Revelation. His ability to have God draw back the curtain so that he can see the reality – not just of what will be, but of what is; and that theologian, N. T. Wright says we as Christians are constantly looking for those thin places, where the reality of God's work and the hope of the kingdom coming is closer than it might be in our ordinary lives, in our ordinary circumstances.

DAVE BAST

And it is all real; I mean, it is not just this remote, maybe, what if, someday, you know, hope for the best. Peter, a little bit later in this first chapter, emphasizes really our privileged position as Christians. He says the prophets wrote about this, and talked about it, and longed for it, and they never got to see it; they never got to experience it; and even the angels wanted to look into this, he says, in a famous verse – in verse 12 – can you imagine this ring of angels sort of peering down – and what they wanted to see is the unfolding of God's plan of salvation; and we have gotten to see it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and what Peter wants to do – and what we will be thinking about in this program – is to establish that very, very firmly for the people who are suffering. He is writing to powerless people who are suffering at the hands of Rome; suffering at the hands of the world; suffering scorn and eye-rolling and ridicule and active physical persecution and getting beat up sometimes. He wants to establish that we have this hope, and it is not going away; but then he also wants to help make clear what it means and what it does not mean. You know, Dave, you said earlier we sometimes shy away from talking about heaven, and I think maybe part of the reason for that is that Christians in the past have been accused of being so heavenly minded, they are of no earthly good. We are pie in the sky...

DAVE BAST

Right, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

By and by, and we are worthless for this life.

DAVE BAST

It is all escapism.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Peter does not want that.

DAVE BAST

Is the critique. It is all just counseling people who are suffering, who are getting it in the neck to be gentle and quiet and submit, because maybe someday beyond the clouds you will get yours, if you are faithful and submissive; and it is often used as a club by the powerful to keep down the weak; and that is a kind of distortion, a kind of twisting of the scriptures that we clearly want to see.

MEG JENISTA

With so many opportunities to look at this text and think: Well, yes, but... And what about this circumstance? It is going to be important for us to spend some time talking about what Peter did *not* mean before we can see clearly what he *did* mean.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, and today we are studying 1 Peter. We are working our way through that letter in a series of programs that focus on the subject of Christian suffering. What is it? Why does it come? How do we face it? We are in Chapter 1 now, and talking about this hope of heaven that Peter holds out for Christians.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what Peter wants to go on to help us see is what does it mean to have that vision of an unfading, imperishable hope? It cannot rust or fade or spoil. It cannot be stolen. We have to remember that, Peter says; but it does not make us pie in the sky by and by; it does not make us passive. That is not what it is supposed to do; but maybe for a little while it might be interesting to talk about some ways you could misuse that kind of a heavenly vision when faced with your own suffering or someone else's suffering.

Meg Jenista:

Well, I think it is crucial that we talk about that because we have a long history, in Christian and in non-Christian circles, the idea of using that hope of heaven in a way that undermines rather than empowers people to live toward Christ's kingdom in this life. I think particularly of Karl Marx and his famous attribution of the Christian life as an opiate for the masses – that religion is an opiate for the masses. The idea being that it anesthetizes people so that they just – well, just go on with your life as is and someday in heaven you will be rewarded, but for now, sit down, shut up, do not complain.

DAVE BAST

It sort of deadens their conscience or their sense of outrage so that they go on accepting their suffering – their downtrodden, unjust... We have used a couple times, too, the phrase: Pie in the sky, which is a real dismissive remark; sort of sweeping the idea of heaven away. That actually – I remember learning this some time ago – comes from a song, a kind of anthem that was sung in the early labor movement, and it was mocking, again, very similar to the opiate idea, that religion and its promises of future happiness and blessing and glory if you are only good and patient – it is a way of taking the edge off the sense that we need to challenge these unjust structures and these ways in which people are being done down. People are being oppressed, and it is not right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, whatever the heavenly vision does mean for us – and we can talk about that in the last part of this program – it does not mean that you have an excuse not to feel compassion; it does not mean you see somebody who is suffering and you say to them: Hey, remember your inheritance in heaven and this will not hurt so much. Have a good day; and you go on your way. The New Testament is full of material, including

from James, but also Paul; compassion is a fruit of the spirit, and James says if you have faith but you have no works, if you see someone suffering and just say: The Lord be with you, and then you walk away, you are not doing right; so, whatever the heavenly vision means, it does not make you callous; it does not make you uncaring; it does not make you tell somebody: Oh, if you think more about Jesus, it will not hurt so much. That is not what you are supposed to do.

MEG JENISTA

The poet, Ted Loder, has this great line that says: Justice is love with its sleeves rolled up; and I like that image because I also think it speaks to the kind of love that we see personified in the life of Jesus Christ; who for himself took on any amount of suffering; but when he encountered injustice in the world around him, his love compelled him to roll his sleeves up and engage the work of justice; and certainly, that works in tandem or in parallel with what Peter is saying here.

DAVE BAST

And I think this is a theme we are going to come back to over and over in these programs; it all depends on how you use these passages, and who is doing the using of them. This is not intended for powerful people to pick up like a club in order to beat back the legitimate aspirations of the poor. This is not intended to justify social injustice or repression. It is intended to give hope and encouragement to people who are struggling – who are suffering – who do not see a way out or see a way forward. Interestingly, also, we ought to point out that it is the very Christians who most believed in the full promises of the Gospel who were most engaged historically in struggling against injustice in the world. There is a famous C. S. Lewis quote to that effect. The Christians who challenged slavery were largely evangelical Christians who had a conventional view of heaven and the life to come; and he says at the end of that passage: If you aim at heaven, you get the earth thrown in. You get them both. If you aim at the earth, you do not get either one.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; you just do not get it right because that same heavenly vision that is properly a source of encouragement and hope for people while they suffer – that same vision is used as the motivation to work for a better world; to feed the hungry. We cannot forget that that is part of what Jesus said, too. We encounter Jesus where? Well, when we feed the hungry and when we clothe the naked and when we visit the people in the prisons; when we work to alleviate injustice. So, it is both/and; you keep your eyes on both worlds and you do not use either world as a reason to downplay the other one. You do not look at the suffering on earth and say: Well, I guess I really do not have an inheritance in heaven or I would not suffer; and you do not look at the inheritance in heaven and say: Neh, so earth does not matter and other people suffering does not matter; I am just going to heaven and this world is not my home; I am just passing through. Nope, it has to be both/and all the time.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and, you know, we are going to want to ask: Okay, how do we use this vision of a future – of salvation in the future? Someone once said that salvation really has three tenses to it, you know; in the New Testament, there is a past tense: We have been justified by faith. We have been saved – I got saved at such and such a time is the way some Christians like to talk. Yes, our guilt has been dealt with; our sin has been paid for; but we are still in the process of being saved – of being delivered – both from ourselves – from our own corrupt nature – and also from all of the forces around us – the forces of evil; and then, someday we will be saved, and that future sense is what Peter is holding forth here to keep us looking forward; to keep us encouraged and hopeful, but it does not deny the fact that presently we are caught in these processes that are often ugly and painful.

MEG JENISTA

Well, and we live – as North American Christians – we live in a culture that reminds us that we have rights and that we ought to spend our time pursuing our rights; and the Christian vision is the idea of upholding the rights of others; thinking about what we can legitimately sacrifice for the cause of Christ and for the Gospel in our own lives; so next we need to look at what Peter is saying to us individually about what it is we are

called to sacrifice to participate in the Gospel and in the kingdom and in salvation.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where today we are digging into 1 Peter, and Peter's words about Christian suffering. I am Scott Hoezee, and I am with Meg Jenista and Dave Bast today; and we are looking at what do Peter's words about keeping our eyes focused on that inheritance in heaven that cannot fade or spoil – what does it mean? How does remembering the fact that Jesus has put this in heaven and it cannot go away – what does that do for us when we are in the midst of suffering?

MEG JENISTA

I think an analogy to music is that it allows us to see the key that we are playing in. Many of us think, okay, I need to hit the right note; what is the next note that is coming; and I need to hit all the notes perfectly; but instead, with that vision of heaven, we have the opportunity to know what key we are playing in, and to make some choices about how we are going to play within that key.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a good analogy, because what Peter is doing for his readers, many of whom were suffering quite cruelly at the time, near as we can tell, is helping them not to give thanks for their suffering and not to act like suffering is no big deal for them or anybody else; but somehow to, right, to hear the music – to know the key they are in – so they could still give thanks and still have hope in the midst of suffering; and that can be pretty tough all by itself.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I think the key word that you just brought up, Scott, is *hope*. To have hope, you need to have a future. Imagine a situation; somebody is dying and you are sitting there and the doctor comes in and you look expectantly and he says: I'm sorry; there is no hope. Meaning there is no future. This is the end. And it seems like each of us will face that moment. We come to the end – the end of our hopes for what ever it was – a career, maybe, or to have a family or to sort something out or to go on living; and when there is no more hope, you are finished.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; yes.

DAVE BAST

And all you can muster is a sort of resignation; okay, I will play out the hand. I know I am going to lose. I remember reading once that Abraham Lincoln's favorite line was: This too shall pass. That is how you get through suffering, as he experienced a lot of personal tragedy: This too shall pass. Well, finally you come to something that will not pass. It just stops; it is the end; but because we have a future, we always have hope.

MEG JENISTA

It makes me grateful that I am a pastor rather than a doctor, because a doctor has to come into a room at some point and say there is no hope; and as I walk into any room, whether it is in a hospital or a front living room, or even in hospice care, I never walk in and say there is no hope. My message is the message of Peter, it is the message of the Christian Gospel through all times, that regardless, there is hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Barbara Brown-Taylor wrote one time that when she was a chaplain in a hospital she noticed that the doctors only called for her when they had nothing more to say. There is no hope; the chaplain will come in now.

DAVE BAST

The chaplain will see you. Thanks a lot.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, Dave, we did a series on faith, hope, and love recently here on *Groundwork*, and one of the things we said about hope at that time is that a lot of people – sometimes I think even people in the Church – think that hope is kind of the same thing as optimism; but we said, no. Optimism says things are going to get better; hope says they might get worse, but we will still have the hope, because it is not dependent upon circumstances.

DAVE BAST

Right; and again, we do not make light of suffering and death, and the end of our dreams. We do not pretend that that is nothing. It is not nothing. I think about Jesus outside Lazarus' grave – there is a classic chapter – John 11; and he cries, even though he is going to raise the guy in a few minutes. People have always asked: Why is he crying? He was angry. He hated death. Death was the enemy; but he also said, "I am the resurrection and the life," and that is our inheritance. That is our future salvation kept by God, guaranteed by the resurrection. Jesus did it. It has happened, and we do have this to look forward to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the great thing that Peter does here, and throughout this letter, as we will see in future programs, that he knows the central paradox of the Gospel; and that is that the worst thing that could ever happen in history already happened. We put God's Son to death. That is the worst thing that could ever happen. Not only did that not end the Gospel, that was the beginning of the Gospel. So the world thinks: If we beat up Christians, we will beat the faith out of them. We Christians know: No, Jesus getting beat up is where our faith comes from. You cannot knock the stuffing out of our faith. Jesus has already been there for us.

DAVE BAST

Jiu jitsu. God takes the worst and flips it over and turns it into the ground of our salvation. That is it. That is what our faith proclaims and that is what we believe.

MEG JENISTA

And it is certainly borne out in any number of Christian testimonies throughout the ages, and throughout the world today. It is difficult for us because we may not have that testimony, but others in the world have this testimony, and they equate their suffering with an engagement of the Gospel; and they identify themselves with Christ in their suffering.

DAVE BAST

You mentioned the testimony of Christians through the ages; it makes me think just now of John Wesley, the great founder of Methodism who died in extreme old age – I think in 1791 – and the last two days his friends had gathered at his bedside and he tried to sing God's praises: I'll praise my Maker while I've breath; and his last words just before he went to heaven were this: Best of all is this; God is with us. That is the best of all. God is with us and he is keeping this inheritance – he is shielding it – he is guarding us – he is guarding it; but he is always with us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That reminds me of something Fred Craddock – the preacher, Fred Craddock – said in one of his great sermons, where he said: You know, the disciples, once they became apostles, they performed a majestic flip-flop; because for the Jews looking for the Messiah for so long, their catch phrase was: When the Messiah comes, no more suffering. But then after the disciples met the real Messiah in Jesus, the crucified One, they turned that around and they said: From now on until he comes again, wherever there is suffering, that is where you find the Messiah. God is with us in our suffering, and that is the hope that he is giving to his readers who are suffering so very much themselves.

DAVE BAST

And Peter's colleague, John, put it this way in his Gospel: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. Or, in some translations, does not understand it – does not get it – but it is true.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It shines on.

MEG JENISTA

Thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. Do not forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/dual-citizenship>

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