

1 Peter 1:17-21 *Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing—we're behind." The man replied, "Boy, that must be discouraging." "Why should I be discouraged?" the boy asked. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!" You have to appreciate that kind of optimistic hope.

Perhaps we could use a little hope like this right now. It's safe to say that by now the quarantine funk is starting to settle in. When the Stay at Home orders were first issued, we steeled ourselves with the attitude that we can do this! But the longer this drags on without any clear answer for the future, the more our hope starts to wane and the funk sets in. The challenges and problems that confront us only add to the funk—the kids missing their friends, the bills that come in without money to take care of them, the homework that you can't help the kids with, you've already binge-watched all the shows on Netflix or Hulu and there isn't anything more you want to watch, etc. It's easy for hope to start to wane.

This will start to affect how we live and our perspective of things. Hope is important to us. Hope (or the lack thereof) will affect the way that we live. Hope has been described as not just a wish that things will get better like the little boy in the story I just told you. Hope is the actual belief, the knowledge that things will indeed get better. Hope provides the power that energizes us with life. It's been said that a person can live 40 days without food, 4 days without water, 4 minutes without air, but only 4 seconds without hope. Hope keeps us going when times are tough. It creates excitement for the future. It gives us reasons to live. It gives us strength and courage. Hope empowers us!

Hope is what Peter offers us in God's Word. 1 Peter has been described as "a treasury of hope for Christians living in a hopeless world." Peter wrote this letter to Christians who were facing persecution, difficulties and death because of their faith. It would be easy for their hope to wane. They had come to believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin. But instead of life getting easier for them, it became much more difficult. They could have rid themselves of all of these problems and difficulties by giving up their faith. Turning away from Jesus would have made their earthly lives much easier. Yet, Peter urged them to stand strong. He encouraged them to trust in Jesus, live obediently in hard circumstances and keep their hope fixed on God's ultimate deliverance. It was the hope that God offered to them for eternity through Jesus that would help them to stand firm. Let's follow Peter's encouragement.

He starts by reminding them that we "*call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially.*" Now, that sounds like it could be a little heavy handed on Paul's part by reminding them of this. Yet it lays before them the truth. When life on this earth is over, we are going to stand before our Father in heaven who judges each person's work impartially. That means you can't fool God. You can't flatter him into ignoring the facts or pull a fast one on him. You can't follow a religion of the lips but not of life. Earthly status, wealth, reputation, ritual and pious façade cannot deflect God's evaluation of heart and life. When we stand before God when our time on this earth is over, he will judge us by his standard of perfection. That in itself could cause us to lose hope. Standing before an impartial judge who will only accept perfection doesn't give us any hope. We know that we have not been perfect, not any of us. We know what we deserve for our sins. We deserve God's eternal wrath and punishment in hell. Since we know that when we stand before God we'll be condemned to hell, how can we have any hope?

The hope we have comes from the value we hold in God's eyes. He knew our situation. In fact, before the world even began, God knew what was going to happen to us. But he also had planned beforehand our salvation. It wasn't with perishable things like silver and gold that God planned to bring about our salvation. That's a good thing too. We've seen how fickle these things can be. When the stock market fell, a lot of people lost a lot of money. When companies had to shut down because of the Stay at Home orders, jobs were lost or at least put on hold. God didn't use what is perishable and fickle to bring about our salvation. He used the precious blood of his only Son! This is the value that you hold in God's eyes! You are worth him shedding the blood of his only Son to bring about your salvation. Your salvation was so important to God in heaven that even before the world began he chose to send his Son into this world to shed his blood as your Savior so that you can live with him eternally in heaven. Because Jesus came into this world and offered his perfect life as a sacrifice to pay for your sins and rose from the grave, you have the certainty of heaven. Remember before that I said hope is more than a wish for something in the future. Hope is the belief, the certain knowledge of something in the future. This is hope that we have in Jesus—something certain in our future—eternal life with Jesus in heaven. That is true no matter what happens to you here! No matter what trials you face here, no matter how difficult life gets here, even if something so catastrophic were to happen that would shake the mountains and remove the hills, even that couldn't take away from you the eternity that awaits you in heaven because of Jesus! That is our hope. That is our certainty.

That hope empowers us in the lives we now live as we look forward to this eternity. So Peter encourages us: Since you are going to stand before an impartial Father at the end of your life, and because you were so valuable he was willing to shed the blood of his own Son to rescue you from the devil so you can live with him eternally, live your lives as strangers

here on this earth in reverent fear of God. Let's make sure we understand what this "reverent fear" is. There are many people who are living in fear, but it isn't reverent fear. Fear is the reaction one has when in the presence of something greater. Being afraid of the coronavirus is admitting that it is bigger than you. It can take over your body and wreak havoc on your system. For some it can even take your life. Being afraid of your economic future comes from admitting that you have much less control of your financial future than what you'd like to have to admit. But living in this fear is also forgetting that God is bigger than all of this. He conquered death. He raised Jesus from the dead and brought him back to life. Christ Jesus was chosen, slain, resurrected, glorified and revealed to the world and those who believe in him share in his victory and have the hope of living with him eternally.

This hope in Jesus now empowers our living. The reverent fear we live in is the respect we have towards our God who loves us and watches over us. We now live in the heartfelt respect which the God of might and grace deserves. We live our lives rejoicing that even through the challenges that we face here, we know the certainty of what is to come with God in heaven. This is what it means to live as strangers or foreigners here on this earth. I don't know if you've ever had the privilege of traveling outside of our county, but you can instantly recognize that you are not at home as soon as you set foot on the ground. The language is different, the styles are different, the way of life is different. I can say that when you travel abroad, you are never fully comfortable. There's always this feeling that this isn't your home. When you travel, you are much more willing to put up with troubles and challenges. You are always more set to face your challenges and overcome them. You're always willing to put up with more grief when you travel. You don't load up on things because you can't carry them all with them. Living as foreigners means you aren't settled where you are at but are looking forward to finally getting back home.

Peter encourages us that this is how we are to live here on this earth—as foreigners who are traveling toward their eternal home empowered by the hope that we have in Jesus. The problem, of course, is that too often instead of living as foreigners, we live as if this were our permanent home. We live as citizens and residents. Too often, that means focusing on our comforts and pleasures. Too often that means setting our hearts on what we can see—earthly values and institutions, material things, approval from others and the like. We put our hope in our money, find our security in the pleasures of this earth, and define our worth and value from who we are and what we can offer. Yet, as we have just recently found again, what is visible is too easily perishable and has no lasting value. To put our hopes and securities in what we can see Peter says is an empty way of life. While it might be fun here, it won't last. We will be found wanting when we stand before our God in heaven.

What a great call to repentance this is for us! God, forgive us for all the times that we have lived as permanent residents of this earth instead of foreigners. God forgive us for living as if Jesus were dead and not alive and found our identity and value and worth in who we were instead of who He made us. God help us to remember at all times the value we have before Him which He displayed in sending Jesus to be our Savior. Help us always to recognize the extravagant price He paid to make us His own. God give us the certain hope of our eternal destination and let that hope empower us as we now live out our lives. Our joy is that we can be certain of the forgiveness God offers to us in Jesus. His perfect sacrifice was accepted by God when he raised Jesus from the dead. Though we don't deserve it, he has exchanged our sins with Jesus' righteousness to make us the holy people he demands that we be. Now, we have the certainty of standing before him as the perfect holy people who will live with him eternally. That is our hope.

Now let that hope empower you as you live out your life! Let the price which Jesus paid for you and the eternal life his death and resurrection secured for you lead you to live as God's people in a way that honors and glorifies him. The hope you have in Jesus changes how you live. It changes the perspective you have on the challenges you face. Even when you are faced with obstacles and challenges that seem insurmountable, in Jesus you are still able to see a path to the future. You have an eternity with him in heaven waiting for you. The Savior who rose from the dead to rescue you from sin lives to watch over you and see you through. Your calling as a child of God changes your entire life: your attitude, your motivation, your sense of accountability, values and goals as well as your eternal destination. What we have as the people of God is not empty. It won't perish, spoil or fade. It is real, sure and certain. We live with the certainty that we will receive the crown of life at the end. While life here isn't always joyful, in fact it is often a struggle and challenge, our troubles will never negate God's promises for what is to come.

Martin Luther once went through a funk in his life. His wife had an interesting reaction. She came down the stairs wearing all black and looking sorrowful. He asked her, "Who died?" She said, "God did." He replied, "Silly woman, God did not die!" Katie responded, "Oh, I thought by the way that you were acting he had." What a great reminder: Jesus lives and that means there is always hope. No matter how hard life may get, there is still hope because we have the assurance that Jesus died for the sins of the world and most importantly that he died for us and that God accepted his sacrifice on our behalf. We can be optimistic with hope in the face of trial because God has promised eternal life through Jesus awaits. Don't let trials and griefs choke out your hope. Jesus lives! We were bought with his blood and will one day join him in his heavenly home. This is the hope that empowers us! Amen.