

# The Power of Hope

by John Piper

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*The power of hope is a strong confidence in God for the future that produces changes in life and empowers holy love.*

**Duration:** 28:46

**Topics:** "Christian Hope", "Persecution Faith"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the book of 1 Peter and its message of living a holy life in the face of persecution. The preacher emphasizes the importance of love and good deeds in the midst of difficult times. He highlights various verses from 1 Peter that encourage believers to love one another, maintain good conduct, and bless those who mistreat them. The preacher also explains how hope in the grace of God empowers believers to overcome greed and self-pity and live a life of love.

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## Transcript

The Apostle Peter, writing about 30 years after Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead, took up his pen to say something encouraging to a group of very beleaguered Christians in Asia Minor. They were being abused by overbearing bosses, they were being criticized and threatened by unbelieving spouses, and they were being ridiculed by skeptical associates and neighbors. That's the background of 1 Peter.

And on the horizon there loomed up a much more violent persecution on the way. And the question that this raised for those believers there in Asia Minor, and the question that I think is raised for us today, is how can we have the power of soul? How can we have the power of soul in times of great stress and anxiety to not just endure the evil day, but to be joyful and to fill our lives with the fruits of righteousness, with deeds of kindness and projects of mercy and labors of love? How, when your life is threatened, or your job is threatened, or your health, or your marriage, or your respect in the community, how, when your life is threatened, can you have the power to rise up with joy and bless those who abuse you and do them good? It takes a power to fill your life with good deeds. When you're under stress, it takes more than power, at least more than human power.

When your life is falling apart, the power that it takes to love those who seem to be a part of that is divine, supernatural. If that's what we're called to do, then we're going to have to look beyond ourselves for help. And as you all know, the Bible, and especially 1 Peter, does not lighten our load by saying, well, when things are going tough, it's okay to think about yourself and not worry too much about other people.

In fact, Peter seems to say in his letter that the tougher the times, the greater the need for living a life for others rather than just a life for ourselves. Listen to the way he writes. In chapter 1, verse 22, having purified your souls by an obedience to the truth for sincere love of brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart.

Or chapter 2, verse 12, I beseech you as aliens and exiles, do not be conformed to your former passions, which war against your soul, but maintain good conduct among the Gentiles so that in case they speak against you as evildoers, they might see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Or chapter 3, verse 9, don't return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you have been called in order that you might obtain a blessing. If you would see life and love good days, let your lips not speak guile and your mouth not have any evil in it.

Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. Or chapter 4, verse 8, where it says, above all things, hold unfailing your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

There is no slackening of the summons to live like Jesus, and therefore Peter simply does not lighten our load by saying, when times are tough, take thought for yourself and not for others. Instead, he goes about the problem of power another way. He gives us a word by which we can love.

He begins his letter in verse 3 of chapter 1, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has begotten us anew unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The power by which Peter wants to help us love each other and all men is the power of hope. If they're going to live like Jesus in times of stress and anxiety, then they're going to have to be filled with hope, Peter's saying.

There is no way to live the life Jesus called us to live if we don't have hope. Now, I want to ask three questions this morning and try to answer them regarding this living hope in verse 3 of chapter 1. First of all, I want to ask, what is it? What is living hope? And second, I want to ask, how does it arise in the heart? Where does it come from? And then third, I want to ask, how does having living hope produce love in our lives? First then, what is this living hope? The New Testament idea of hope is very, very different from the way hope is talked about in our own day. We say, are the North Stars going to win the Stanley Cup? And someone answers, I don't know, but I hope so.

In other words, hope, as we typically use it, is an expression of a desire of which we are uncertain. And that is not at all the way the New Testament uses the word hope. And if we think that way about hope, we will not understand the New Testament usage of the word hope.

For example, in chapter 1, verse 13, when Peter says, hopefully in the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, he does not mean that we should desire it but scratch our heads and wonder whether Jesus Christ is coming back with grace for his people. That was a matter of certainty for the apostles, including Peter. Hopefully means desire it and have a strong confidence that it will indeed take place.

Another example would be Hebrews chapter 6, verse 11, where the writer says, we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness of realizing the full assurance of hope. So hope in the New Testament could be defined like this, a full assurance or a strong confidence that God is going to do good to us in the future. It's not a question mark.

It's not a wish. But there's something more peculiar about this hope as Peter defines it here in verse 3. He calls it a living hope. What does that word living mean about this hope that we're to have? Well, what would be the opposite of living hope? Living hope, the opposite would be dead hope.

And that reminds me of a similar phrase in the second chapter of James, where he refers to dead faith and he defines dead faith as faith that is barren, fruitless, unproductive in chapter 2, verse 20. So living faith and by analogy, living hope would be faith or hope that is fertile, fruitful, productive. So New Testament hope, if it is living, will make changes.

It will be productive. It will have an effect. That's the meaning of the word living also, for example, in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 12, where the word of God is called living.

The word of God is living and active or living and effective. It makes changes. It produces things.

So the definition, I think, of hope in the New Testament would be something like a strong confidence in God for the future, a strong confidence that will produce changes in life. It is a powerful thing, not a dead thing. Now, the second question then that we want to raise this morning about hope is how does such hope arise in the heart? Where does it come from if we're going to have it? Part of the answer is given in verse 3, and then part of it is given down in verse 23 through 25.

Verse 3, he says, So what we can say from verse 3 is hope arises through a new birth that in some way is brought about through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then in verse 23 to 25, he says, You have been born anew, same phrase as back up in verse 3, not with perishable seed but with imperishable through the living and abiding word of God. For all flesh is like grass and its glory is like the flower of grass.

The grass withers, the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures or abides forever. That word is the good news which was preached to you. So connecting the resurrection of Jesus, which is 2,000 years old, and my new birth, which comes 2,000 years later, filling in that huge gap is the word of God, the testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gospel as it's defined in verse 25, which Paul says is Jesus Christ died for your sins according to the scriptures.

He was raised, he was buried, and he was raised from the dead according to the scriptures. That message delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit links the historical event of the resurrection and my new birth 2,000 years later. Now, how do these two things work together? I don't think that's hard to understand.

The historical event of the resurrection and the present declaration of it in the preaching of the gospel. The resurrection won't produce hope in anybody if they haven't heard about it. That's very simple.

That's not hard to understand. There has to be a linking up with a message about the historical event. But the other way around is true, too.

A message about an event won't produce any hope unless we have some reason to believe that the event reported really is true, really happened. On Pentecost morning, if the Pharisees and the scribes could have turned up the dead body of Jesus, Peter could have preached till he was blue in the face and nobody would have been born anew unto a living hope. But in fact, he preached and they couldn't turn up that body and thousands were born anew unto a living hope.

And the fact that there's necessary truth behind words is shown also by the way Paul proceeds in 1 Corinthians 15, where he defines the gospel because he goes on to say, right after he says Jesus was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve, and then to five hundred brethren at once, some of whom, most of whom, are still alive, although some have fallen asleep. The only reason Paul would catalog those witnesses is to tell these Corinthians it is not a testimony that is incredible. It is credible.

There are reliable witnesses to it and they have been passed on down to us in the New Testament. Hope for life arises through a credible testimony that Jesus Christ did in fact rise from the dead. But now two further questions arise from that for me.

How is it that a credible testimony to the resurrection of a man 2,000 years ago can produce hope, life-changing hope in my life, centuries later? And then the second question that comes to me is, how come such a change in my life would be called new birth? Let's think about that first one. I'll tell you how it is for me personally. How it is that a resurrection 2,000 years ago can produce hope today, radically effective life-changing hope.

It functions in two ways in my own life. I look back at that testimony and that event and the first thing it declares to me is this, Jesus Christ is alive. And here in 1981, April 19, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 8th Street and 13th Avenue, as close as that lily.

Lord, you know I believe that. And I pray that you will make these people feel it. You are as close to them as the person next to them.

That's what the resurrection means for me first of all. The Christ who died for me and gave himself for me is as near as these flowers and just as sweet. But there's a second way it gives hope.

Every bit as important as the first because someone might raise the question, how do you know that this is a hopeful presence? How do you know that the Jesus who is risen is not against you but is for you? The resurrection of Jesus Christ does a second thing for me. It answers that question. When Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Father, comes again.

If that is all true, then I can take his word that what happened on the cross is true. In other words, his resurrection certifies to me that what he said happened on the cross came true. And here's what he said.

He said in John 15, I lay down my life for my friends. He died for me. And the second thing he said was, I came to ransom you.

He ransomed me for sin. Here's the way Peter put it in 318. Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God.

The resurrection certifies to me that what's happened on the cross is true. It's effective. Here's the way Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15.

If Jesus Christ were not raised from the dead, we would still be in our sins. And therefore the converse is true. Since he has been raised from the dead, we are no longer in our sins.

Our sins are forgiven. And if our sins are forgiven, God is not against us. He is for us.

And if God is for us, who can be against us? You know what Paul said in Romans eight in that great passage, he who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. How then will he not freely with him? Give us all things who shall bring any charge against God's elect. It is God who justifies who is to condemn.

It is Jesus Christ who died. Yes. And who was raised from the dead, who is seated at the right hand of the father, who indeed intercedes for us.

That's how a 2000 year old event can produce hope in my heart. It certifies to me that all my sins were taken care of on the cross and that therefore God is not against me. He is for me.

And that the Jesus who loved me and gave himself for me is alive and present and caring and with me every single moment of my life. That's a hope producing truth. Why does the production of that hope get called new birth here in verse three of first Peter one? Have you ever asked yourself the question, what makes you you? What's the essence of your personhood? Where does your unique individuality come from that makes you you? I think if you probe deeply enough, what you'll find is that it's not your ideas and it's not your thoughts and it's not your actions.

It's your desires. We are most basically what we crave in life. The primal thing is our yearning, our longing.

Our individuality is determined by what we hanker for in life. And if you change that, something new comes into being. If there's a radical change in your cravings, there's a radical change in your personhood.

And the reason Peter says that we are born anew when we get hope in God and no longer hope in the things of the world is that a new person has come into being when that happens. And now I want to ask, why is it that when that new person comes into being and he is full of hope, why is it that love inevitably flows out from him? Why is there power in hope to love like Jesus loved? Look at 1 Peter 1 verses 13 to 15. Gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct. I want to point out one thing in this text. Notice, conduct conforms to our passions or desires.

Formerly, we were ignorant. Ignorant of what? Ignorant of what he just said to hope in. Ignorant of the grace of God, the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And being ignorant, we had a set of desires that accompanied that ignorance, and it was desires for the opposite of those things, namely the things of the world. And in step with all those desires came our conduct, and it was not holy and it was not loving. But now things have changed.

We are no longer ignorant of the grace of God which is coming to us or the significance of all the promises that are bound up in the resurrection of Jesus. And not being ignorant, we have a new set of desires called hope in the grace of God. And right in step with this hope is going to go holy conduct, which for Peter is fundamentally a life of love.

Now, I want to explain briefly in conclusion three ways that hope works itself out in love. And you think about these psychologically for yourself and if you have not tasted each one of them. I'm sure that you have in some measure.

Even if you're not a Christian, you know what I'm talking about here. Hope empowers holy love, first of all, because it drives out greed and self-pity. Think about now how this works.

If you are anxious about tomorrow, if something has happened in your life to make you just feel terrible about what's coming, you can respond to that in one of two ways. You can either say, usually it's subconscious, well, if tomorrow is so bleak, I may as well live for today, get as much pleasure as I can now, and it really doesn't make any difference if I have to step on anybody else to get there, because it's all over tomorrow. It's just so rotten.

Nothing good is going to happen. That can either come in a very superficial way, like overeating. Do you ever overeat when you're bored or anxious? More seriously, it can come in stealing.

Well, if tomorrow is so rotten, I may as well get what I can today. I'm going to be thrown in a clinker anyway, one way or the other. Life is miserable.

That's one possible response to anxiety. Greed. Get what you can today.

The other possible response is self-pity or depression. This is more common in the Christian community, probably. It works like this.

We are so nervous, anxious, upset, distraught about tomorrow, that our lives are wholly taken up in consciousness about ourselves, and the result for love? We're so caught up in ourselves, we don't have the inclination or the strength to think about others, to be caring for others, or to do anything for others. So love is roadblocked by anxiety, whether in the form of greed or in the form of self-pity and depression. And what we've got to do then is throw all the forces of hope against that dart from Satan of anxiety.

We've got to gird up our minds, like Paul says, and be sober and set our hope fully on the grace that is coming to us, or think about a promise like 1 Peter 5, 7. Cast all your anxieties on me because I care for you. We've got to preach a sermon to our soul and say, soul, Jesus Christ died for you. All your sins are forgiven.

It's certified in the resurrection of Jesus. God is not against you. He is for you.

He is going to work in all those cruddy things tomorrow for your good. Wake up. Why are you downcast, oh my soul? Hope in God.

Do you ever fight the fight of faith like that? That's the only way to fight the fight of faith from day to day, to throw the forces of hope against anxiety. And when we do, anxiety will start to melt away and with it go greed and with it go self-pity and depression. And you know what the opposite is? We have the force of love again.

Here's a second way that hope functions to empower love. I call it the inevitability of imitation. You know, don't you, that you always tend to imitate what you admire most.

The people you want to be around most and admire most, you gravitate. And you know what that means? That means if we are hoping fully in Christ, if we crave to be with Him and to see Him, we will not be able to help ourselves from becoming like Him. We do not become like Him because we do not want to be with Him very much.

But if our hope grows and becomes strong and full, there is a law that says we will imitate Him. He who thus hopes in Christ purifies himself even as he himself is pure. And then finally, one more way that I think hope produces love.

It gives us the assurance of God's blessing and care which we need to follow through on some of His commands that are very, very hard. Some of His commands seem to require just too much of us, don't they, in the New Testament? And there's only one basic reason why we disobey these commands. We do not have enough hope that blessing will accompany obedience rather than cursing.

We think in our own minds that if I follow through on that, my life will be too miserable. And we do not hope in the promise that He gives. Peter says, do not return evil for evil, but on the contrary, bless.

For to this you were called in order that you might obtain a blessing. You will always, listen to this, you will always be better off if you obey than if you don't obey, even if it costs you your life. Jesus said, truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or lands for my sake in the gospel who will not receive back a hundredfold in this time with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life.

The only way to have the power to follow Christ in the costly way of love is to be filled with hope, with the strong confidence that if we lose our life, we will find it again and much rewarded. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has begotten us anew unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That's a hope that everybody in this room can have.

If you'll pray this prayer with me, bow with me in prayer. Lord Jesus, we believe in our hearts that you were raised from the dead and we believe that that certifies to us that on the cross our sins were forgiven and that therefore you are not against us, oh God, but you are for us and that Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself for us is here with us, helping us, strengthening us, promising good things to us and helping us all the way. Great God, grant us to hope fully in your love so that we might be freed from self-pity and greed and might be driven to imitate you.

And grant us, oh God, that we always believe that there is more to be gained through obedience than through disobedience. And grant, Lord, that in these days of stress and anxiety we might have the power of soul to be joyful and to fill our lives with labors of love. In Jesus' name, amen.

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