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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“A LIVING HOPE”
First Peter 1:1-5 (6-9)

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

His death and resurrection are the most decisive events since the initial act of creation. In them his Father has sealed the doom of sin, death, and the devil.

{Ro 1:16; 2 Th 2:16} This is not a fine point of abstract theology; it is **“the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”** In a world that is still under assault by dark powers (even in their death throes) it is the source of **“eternal encouragement and good hope”** for all who hold fast to Jesus!

Yet many in the American Church are not holding fast. In some quarters hope is giving way to apathy, fear, anger, cynicism and gloom.

Much despair is provoked by changes in the culture: the Christian religion is losing its privileged status; customs regarding sexuality, marriage, and family are in flux; racial and ethnic demographics are shifting; economic structures are being altered; and new technologies are transforming our day-to-day experience. It begs the question: does hope depend on particular cultural traditions, favorable laws and political outcomes?

Much despair is in reaction to personal suffering. Hardship is nothing new, and it has always been *hard*; still, it appears that North American Christians are increasingly shocked and offended when Sovereign God allows

sickness, financial problems, or death into their lives. It begs the question: does our hope depend on physical comfort and material ease?

{Ro 5:5; Heb 6:19; 1 P 1:3} We need hope: real hope, valid hope, powerful hope. **“Hope”** that **“does not put us to shame,”** hope that is **“an anchor for the soul.”** We need resurrection hope, **“a living hope”!**

❑ Please turn with me to First Peter 1:1-5.

Peter’s original audience needs hope, too! I am convinced by the textual and historical evidence that they are ① mostly Jewish Christians ② who previously live in Rome ③ who were evangelized either in Jerusalem at Pentecost or in Rome but ④ were expelled from Rome with other, traditional Jews and required to settle in Asia Minor.

■ In verse 1 Peter identifies them as **“exiles.”**

📖 English has no precise equivalent for the Greek *παρεπιδημοις* [parepidēmois] so our Bible translations render the word in diverse ways: {NIV} **“strangers,”** {NRSV} **“exiles,”** {GNB} **“refugees,”** {CEV} **“foreigners,”** {NASB} **“those who reside as aliens,”** {NCV} **“people who are away from their homes.”**

This poignant expression conveys the social and emotional experience of the outsider, the stranger in a strange land, the resident alien with the exotic accent and odd customs, the foreigner whose presence provokes resentment and suspicion among the natives.

Not only are Peter’s first readers ethnic and cultural foreigners, they are spiritual aliens. They serve a different king: Christ crucified and risen. They

adhere to a different ethic: the law of *αγάπη* [agapē] love. They follow a different road: the way of self-denial and cross-carrying.

The life of a spiritual alien can be lonely, wearisome, discouraging. It is tempting to try to achieve belonging by blending in, by “going native” if you will.

Tempting, but foolish! It might be possible to fit in by conforming to some other segment of the culture, but we risk gaining a small, fleeting hope at the expense of losing a great and eternal one.

{Jn 1:11} Real hope, valid hope, living hope is being united with Jesus, who was himself a spiritual alien. **“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him”**: Pharisees rejected him for eating with sinners, Sadducees for undermining the Temple system, Herodians for threatening the status quo, and Zealots for complying with Roman tax policies. Jewish bigots rejected him for befriending Samaritans and Gentiles, Samaritan and Gentile bigots for being Jewish, chauvinists for including women, and the rich for challenging their economic values.

■ {Is 53:3} Yet in verse 3 Peter declares that it is **“through the resurrection of”** the Son of Man who **“was despised and rejected by others,”** that his Father **“has given us new birth into a living hope”** for acceptance and belonging.

■ And this hope does not disappoint! In verses 1-2 we discover that Peter’s audience is **“God’s elect,”** his special people, **“chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”**

Take heart! If we are alive in Jesus we also have been **“chosen [by]...the Father ... through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to ...Christ and sprinkled with his blood.”** It is a far better thing to fit in with the Living God than to fit in with the dominant culture of this dying world!

■ Going back to verse 1, Peter states that his readers are **“scattered.”**

📖 The Greek *διασπορα* [diasporas] literally means *“of the dispersion.”* A “diaspora” is a forced relocation of a people group from their homeland to other places. Whereas “exile” emphasizes being out of place in your current home, “diaspora” accentuates the experience of distance from your true home.

{Jn 14:2-3} Peter’s original audience has first-hand experience of geographical diaspora. More importantly they are part of a *spiritual* diaspora, for the Messiah was addressing his disciples in every time and place when he said: **“My Father’s house has plenty of room... I am going there to prepare a place for you... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”**

The cliché rings true: **“Home is where the heart is.”** As **“God’s elect”** their hearts are with Jesus, though through no choice of their own they are far from that place.

Life in the diaspora can be confusing. It is tempting to cling too tightly to this world, as though money and possessions secure our present and guarantee our future.

Tempting, but foolish! It might be possible to become work and scrimp and save and stockpile the stuff of this world, but we risk gaining a small, fleeting hope at the expense of losing a great and eternal one.

{Php 2:6-7; 2 Co 8:9; Mt 8:19; Lk 12:15} Real hope, valid hope, living hope is in being united with Jesus **“of the dispersion.” “He made himself nothing by [becoming] a servant.” “He was rich, yet for [our] sake he became poor.”** When a teacher offered to follow him Jesus replied, **“Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”** He had no financial safety net, and did not own **“[many] possessions.”**

■ Yet in verse 4 Peter declares that it is **“through the resurrection of”** the Son of Man, who owned little more than the clothes on his back and the sandals on his feet, that his Father **“has given us new birth into a living hope”** for a rich inheritance.

■ {Mt 6:21} And this hope does not disappoint! In verses 4-5 we discover that Peter’s audience has been born **“into [this] inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. [It] is kept in heaven” “where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”**

● Take heart! If we are alive in Jesus we, too, have a **“faith”** that is **“of greater worth than gold”** (verse 7). This reward is infinitely more valuable than anything this fading world has to offer!

● That is not the end of it. Moving forward into verse 6, we learn that Peter’s audience has **“had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”** The language of suffering and

persecution permeates this letter, especially chapters 3 and 4.

☑ {Jobes, pp 44-45} These men and women are **“being slandered and maligned”** for their obedience to Christ Jesus. **“Their social status, family relationships, and... even their livelihood [is] threatened.”** They are objects of **“suspicion, mistrust... disapproval”** and **“verbal abuse.”**

None have been subjected to physical torture or execution, yet. But that will change. Some will be compelled to choose between martyrdom and apostasy.

“Grief,” “trials” “of all kinds,” and persecution are scary. It is tempting to avoid suffering by pulling away from Jesus or even renouncing one’s Christianity.

Tempting, but foolish, for that is a dead hope! If, by spiritual backpedaling we are able to evade hardship, we risk gaining a small and fleeting hope at the expense of losing a great and eternal one.

{1 Pe 2:21; Php 2:8; Mt 26:67; 27:26, 29-30} Real hope, valid hope, living hope is being united with Jesus, who **“suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example, that we should follow in his steps.”** He submitted to evil men who **“struck him with their fists”** and **“slapped him”** and **“flogged”** him. They **“set” “a crown of thorns” “on his head,”** and repeatedly **“struck him on the head”** with a staff. He obediently heeded his Father’s command all the way **“to death – even death on a cross!”**

■ {Is 53:5} Yet in verse 3 Peter declares that it is “**through the resurrection of**” the Son of Man, who “**was pierced for our transgressions**” and “**crushed for our iniquities,**” that his Father is “[shielding]” us “**by [his] power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in this last time.**”

● And this hope does not disappoint! In verse 7 we discover that “**these [trials] have come**” on Peter’s audience “**so that their faith may result in praise, glory and honor when Christ is revealed.**”

● Take heart! If we are alive in Jesus we also “**are receiving the end result of [our] faith, the salvation of [our] souls**” (verse 9). The gift of eternal life is worth any earthly hardship and loss!

American culture is changing.

We are confronted by hardships of various kinds.

We can choose to give in to apathy, fear, anger, cynicism and gloom; or, we can choose hope.

The Living God “**has given us new birth into a living hope**”!