

The church was full. It was in the days when they could be. The minister soon would have our undivided attention.

We had come to give thanks for a man's life. Some call it paying respects. Others see it as expressing sympathies.

For all of us it was the stark reminder that one day we will each be in that box out the front. People will come to speak about our life. In our death we will force others to think about their own mortality.

All seemed ready for the service to begin. The advertised time start had passed and I wondered why the minister had not yet got proceedings underway. I was reminded of the saying a mentor once told me, "If you're early, you're wasting your own time, if you're late, you're wasting someone else's."

My mind began to wander. As I looked at the casket I asked myself what hymns I would like at my funeral.

1 Peter 1, verses 3-9 was the text for that funeral service that was about to get underway. I read it and decided without a great deal of deliberation that 1 Peter 1 verses 3-9 was right for the occasion. So I had my own funeral service planned in the space of a few minutes.

In the time of 'reflection', as the outline included, which I think meant *reflection* on the passage, the minister told us that 1 Peter 1:3-9 expressed the hope that Christians had in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That the man whose life we had come to acknowledge owned that hope for himself, so he had received his inheritance.

I couldn't help thinking in that packed church, how many of them wondered how you make the jump from *hope* to *inheritance*?

Or how many of them thought that hope was really nothing more than a positive attitude, without *any real certainty about the outcome*. I wondered how many of those present weren't at all convinced about the promise of an inheritance after death. Indeed of anything after death.

If hope is nothing more than '*hope so*', when faced with the certainty of our own death – that none of us can avoid – does the bible give us any more assurance than *the power of positive thinking*?

The writer of this passage responds to that question. I don't know if he was asking it, but I think most of us have. Is life after death more than a hope-so?

Three certainties. A living hope. A lasting hope. A loving hope.

Firstly, v 3. **God has given us a new birth into a living hope.** Please note, it does not say *he might* give us, it does not say *he will* give us. It is very clear. *He has* given us.

This is in the past tense, because it is a past event. In fact it depends on a past event...v 3...the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If Jesus is your personal Saviour and Lord, you have been born again.

The new and living hope – v 3 - is by the hand of God's great mercy. It's a gift. Hope is a noun, not a verb.

The resurrection of Jesus' guarantees your resurrection. It's the Christian's break-through moment. Jesus broke through death in his work on the cross.

And so have all those who are united with him. V 2. Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, through the saving work of the cross. Sprinkled with his blood.

You've heard of dashed hopes. We've all experienced them. Relationships that didn't work out. Jobs we didn't get. Deals that couldn't be done. Results that didn't go as planned.

There's no dashed hope here. Though it's somewhat ironic that the living hope gifted Christians comes through death. And unless Christ has died for you, you are just hanging on to a dead hope.

That's the difficulty with religion. It's full of dead hope. Religion is always wanting to make hope a verb rather than a noun. What must I be doing to make sure life after death can be secured?

From the opening verses Peter says stop making hope a verb. He writes to God's elect. V 1. Chosen. V 2.

What you do in the Christian life always follows what Christ has already done. That's the power of genuine obedience. It's not trying to accumulate. It's there to appreciate.

Peter says 'praise God' in v 3. 'Rejoice' in v 6. Experience 'joy' in v 8. V 10 says even the angels long to look into what you have received by God's grace.

And you might be watching this and consider yourself irreligious. You don't care much for people's attempts to explain what happens after death. You wouldn't really know unless you could hear from someone who has been through death and told us what it was like on the other side.

These words will bring you closer to knowing the answer than religion will ever get you. Because you don't have to be religious to be trusting in a dead hope.

And the author know what they look like. That's why secondly, the living hope is a lasting hope.

Secondly, v 4, **God has given us a new birth *into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade – kept in heaven for you.***

Note the connection Peter makes: God is to be praised because he has transformed your present. And he will transform your future.

V 4 reminds us that *what God gives this world cannot take away*. Peter turns the promises on its head.

He begins by saying what God gives us in the Lord Jesus Christ. The living hope. The lasting hope is explained by what can't be taken away. It can never perish, spoil or fade.

Sometimes people look at the bible and think it was written so long ago how can it be relevant today? This verse answers that question.

Life still perishes, spoils and fades as much as it must have done in Peter's time. We're probably just a little more sophisticated in proving it.

Perish. Spoil. Fade. Dashed hopes. Depreciating goods. Declining health. Diminishing looks. Devalued dollars.

Someone once said life is like a Monopoly game. Go round and round searching for the ideal property with money that in the end isn't worth anything. We all finish up in box with a lid on it.

Look at the last sentence in v 4. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed.

God is guarding your inheritance. You can't get that sort of security detail from this world.

With an inheritance to come, God promises to guard your faith. The power of his Spirit drives us to trust once again in the faith of Christ in his work on the cross. When our desires begin to perish, spoil and fade as they will, God renews and refreshes by his promises.

We are like grass that withers and the flower that falls, Peter will say at the end of the chapter. But the word of God within us guards us into eternity, and the inheritance kept in heaven for you.

**A living hope. A lasting hope. A loving hope.**

**And, thirdly – v 8 a loving hope.**

As far as I can tell, everyone has two final assessments of their life. The first is on earth. Don't let your funeral be a place where family and friends are saying 'hope-so', and 'surely'. The most significant legacy you can leave behind is – v 9 – the certainty of your salvation.

The second assessment is in heaven, explained in v 7. Your faith, being proved genuine, through the grief and trials of this life, as the previous verse reminds us, results in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

According to v 9, this is the goal of your faith. And it comes through loving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Love can mean lots of different things. You can love going down the park. Love your dog. Love being with family. Love your spouse.

Loving Jesus is expressed in your faith. In trust. In understanding that being united with him in this living hope and lasting inheritance will mean living for him in the times of challenge and suffering.

We recognize that the trials will come because, v 1, you are an exile. This world is not your home. It's not your inheritance. It's not your hope.

Faith forges us. It is of greater worth than gold which is refined by fire.

Perhaps faith is a more like a diamond. Formed by pressure. Seemingly unfading.

But even this picture will not do. Peter says the gift God has given you in this living lasting hope is that your trials are not meaningless, accidental or just a result of fate.

They lead to a deepening, strengthening, enduring trust in the one whom you love. They are preparing you for v 9, your salvation.

In this world that is wasting away, God never wastes a moment. He is always wanting you to experience the inner, inexpressible and glorious joy that is delivered by the power of his enabling grace.

Peter begins his letter with the end in mind. So if you know what it's like to watch that movie where you know how it's going to end, or that replay where you've heard the final score, then you have caught a glimpse of the living, last, loving assurance the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brings to all for whom has died.

The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the bridge between hope and inheritance.

Don't settle for hope-so.