

April 11 1 Peter 1:3-9 “New Birth, Faith and a Living Hope” theme:

1 Peter 1:3-9 **Praise to God for a Living Hope**

³Praise 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, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Our sermon title this morning is: “New Birth, Faith and a Living Hope” Let’s start off this morning’s sermon with a slow read of our scripture from this morning. That way we can see if this sermon title makes any sense:

*³ 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, ⁴ ...*

Now that is pretty much the Easter message, don’t you think? Through Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection Christ has modeled and then enabled the way where you and I can have **new birth**. A new spiritual birth, because of what Jesus has done, you and I are not stuck living in the spiritual darkness that surrounded and undergirded our old lives but now because of Jesus we have the opportunity to start over again, to have a spiritual new birth. A new birth in this world and new birth and new life for all of eternity. Praise be to God. So perhaps we have the New Birth part of the sermon title explained.

Let’s move on to verse 4 where we can talk about our Living Hope:

⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice,

Our **living hope** through Christ in this world is a **living hope** where we can find ourselves born again in this world, where we can spiritually start over again, maybe right some wrongs, where we can undoubtedly with the help of the Holy Spirit live more Christ-like lives; we have that **living hope** going for us in this world. But we not only have that **living hope** going for us but we now because of Christ have **living hope** going for us for all of eternity. Our futures are secure, our inheritance is kept in heaven and all that is shielded by God’s power, nothing going to get to that. That’s what the scripture says. Through Jesus we have living hope now and for all of eternity.

So, so far, the scripture has reminded us of our new birth through Christ and our living hope through Christ in this world and the next.

But guess what we are not in heaven yet, we have the promise of heaven, we have the living hope of heaven, but we are not there yet. And our living hope in this world that comes from our new birth in this world is many times challenged by the ways of this world.

Something has to spiritually hold us together so we can live in this world in new birth with a living hope and with our blessed eternal lives in mind. Something and someone have to hold all these glorious Godly promises together for us in the midst of some real-world realities, some things that are not necessarily nice things... let’s pick up our scripture

*... though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ **These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith**—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Seems as though our faith may be a key link between the new birth and living hope that we all experience through Jesus in this world and the new birth and living eternal hope we all will experience when we get to heaven. We have to have faith to hold all things together, faith and trust in things perhaps unseen in this world, things that are perhaps sometimes hard to tangibly get ahold of in this world but things that are still without a doubt necessary for God's eternal plans to play out. We have to have faith in Jesus.

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Faith in Jesus Christ ties all this together. New Birth, Living Hope not only in this world but the next all tied together by Faith. Faith in Jesus Christ.

We who are living in this world have available to us the blessings that Easter represents and those blessings are available to us today. We also through Jesus Christ have some even more incredible blessings coming our way in the future for all of eternity. What holds us together in this world as we live and wait for the next world is our faith. Our faith in Jesus Christ, what he has said and done makes all the difference and if we are to realize the many blessings that he would have for us in this world and the next we have to live in faith. Our complete faith in Jesus Christ makes all the difference.

I want to talk about faith today. I **believe** we all have faith; I **believe** that is a common characteristic among we believers. Given that, however, I know that we all have experienced different levels of faith in our ongoing spiritual journeys. We've all had some high points of faith and some not so high points of faith.

Which leads to these questions; what can we do about our faith. How can we work on it? What can we do to grow our faith? What can we do to perhaps find again our faith?

I believe these are some very good questions for us to consider not only for ourselves and our faith journeys but for the others around us who may be watching us on our faith journeys. Do you feel like we as a church, as a community, as a country may be going through a crisis of faith right now?

What can we do to not only work on our own faith but also just as importantly model our faith to the next generation following us, what can we do to model our faith to a world around us that needs to find something they can have faith in? Those are some of the questions I want to talk about this for the rest of this morning.

With all those things in mind, what can we do to work on our faith and effectively model our faith journeys for the people around us.

Well one thing we need to do if we want to work on our faith and model our faith journeys to others is, we need to keep our noses in the bible:

Lesli White writes this: One of the biggest reasons people struggle in their faith lives is because of a weak Scriptural foundation. We need to read God's Word or at least hear it. Romans 10:17 says, "So then, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." If no one had ever told you about Jesus and about God's plan for your life, or you never read about Him yourself, you would be clueless about the need for faith.

Reading or hearing God's Word is like planting a garden. If you want to grow or "build" a garden, you must first plant the seeds, or the actual plant or flower. God's Word is the seed that grows the faith. Knowing His promises, what God says about you, about life, and about Jesus' plan for eternal life won't transplant themselves in your brain by osmosis. Become familiar with the Bible and what faith is all about by meditating on its contents. This will give you the basis for growing and increasing your faith.

Now that sounds like very good advice for any of us who may be struggling with faith issues. Get and keep your noses in God's word. Lots of stories of faith in the bible; We have Abraham and Sarah who on faith left their comfortable lives and went to where God was going to tell them to go. We have Queen Ester, a Jew who married a Babylonian King who out of faith and the prospect of being killed revealed to the king a plot to kill many Jews and because she acted in faith, trusting God ended up saving many Jews. We have Noah and the Ark, we have Daniel in the Lion's Den, we have David and Goliath, we have many, many faith stories to choose from in the bible, and it helps our faith when we meditate on them.

Next thing I think we need to do if we wish to work on our faith: we need to share those faith experiences (and our struggles) with another believers.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says this: Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up."

We should not be ashamed when we are in a down time in our faith journey. We should not hide from others when we are in a down time in our faith journeys. Having a down time is something that we all will have. We need to share those times. God has given us faithful brothers and sisters to walk with us on our faith journeys and we would be doing a disservice to God and God's plan for our lives if we did not take advantage of such a gift. If we are experiencing a crisis of faith, we need to move along side one of our spiritual friends for our own good and we probably ought to do it publicly.

Look at the message we send to the generation of believers following us and look at the message that sends to those in the world who are experiencing a crisis of faith. The message is these Christian kinds of rely on each other in this world and that is a good message. Maybe they will choose to follow our example and draw along side some believer they know of and trust in their lives.

What else can we do, here's one, we should continue to serve. Pick something, some way, to be in service to others; that's a way for us to work on our faith, why because by doing so we help make opportunities for God to reveal himself to us.

Did you ever notice how God shows up when you are serving someone, did you ever experience that? I know I have and I know I can testify in my own life to times in my life when whenever I was in a down-time faith-wise how God used some service project that I was involved in to help

me with my faith. God used my service project as an opportunity for his to show up in the middle of it.

If you are having a crisis of faith go and serve. If you are having a crisis of faith, take that crisis of faith with you, you don't even have to hide it, in fact share it so that others while you serve. So that others can see what you are doing in spite of your faith struggle, that way you are not only working on yours but your example may be being used by God to work on someone else.

And then as you do that, keep your eyes open for some God sightings. In the middle of your service keep your eyes open for God to make himself evident and therefore help you with your faith struggle.

Next: Continue to sacrifice, not only serve but maybe even sacrifice. What do I mean by that, take some steps in faith, even if you don't want to?

2 Corinthians 9: 7-9 "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

You want to work on your faith, well step out in faith. Don't be setting around ringing our heads only wondering what to do, go and do something in faith and see what happens.

Say for instance, Pastor Bob comes to you and asks you to prayerfully consider leading an upcoming bible study or perhaps to serve on this or that committee and you really don't want to but Pastor Bob has you cornered and he is smiling that smile.

And you may be thinking to yourself I don't have enough faith in myself to do this thing that Pastor Bob is asking me to do, well stop thinking that. Pray, talk to God about it and if God doesn't give you a legitimate reason not to do, then step out in faith and try it and see what happens. If you need some help working on your faith journey accept that challenge and see what happens.

Next thing: Continue to smile; if we are having faith issues, we need to maintain a positive attitude. We need to maintain a positive attitude for our own good and for the good of others.

Are you struggling with your faith this morning, if so, it's OK. Hopefully, we have all heard that this morning. It's OK at times to be struggling with our faith, but I believe one of the keys of working on our faith in the middle of a down time is maintaining a good attitude. Gods got this, if God can raise Jesus from the grave, God can help you find your way through your crisis of faith.

And then there is this; look to your left, look to your right is there somebody from the next generation setting by you within viewing distance? Are they looking at you? Think of the kind of message you can send to the next generation when you, in the middle of whatever you are dealing with, maintain the proper attitude.

Keep up the right attitude, we all will struggle at some time or the other but how are we doing in the middle of the struggle. Are we maintaining a positive attitude for ourselves and for others around us to see?

Here's another of my suggestions for working on our faith and perhaps modeling to others how to work on their faith: Continue to ask the hard questions, it is OK to continue to ask hard questions in the middle of a crisis of faith. In fact, asking the hard questions can grow our faith.

Let's look at the example of Job, all you have to do is read a little bit of the book of Job to see that Job ask a lot of hard questions. We all know of the story of Job, a righteous man who for some unknown reason (from his point of view) had all kinds of hardships come into his life. He had some reasons for his crisis of faith.

In the middle of his struggle, he continued to ask hard questions, he continued to stay in communication with God. Here are but a few of his questions: Why didn't I die at birth? Why am I alive while others are dead? Why is my life so hard and painful? Those are some crises of faith like questions. Here are some more:

Why do the wicked prosper, increase in power and live a long life? Why do children often reap the punishment due their parents? Why doesn't God judge wrongdoers and establish justice on earth now?

Job in the middle of his crisis of faith continued to ask, even the hard questions and I believe that shows us that it is OK for us to also ask the hard questions. Go ahead, ask them but then as Job learned, be ready to hear back from God. Get ready to "gird up your loins" like a man, God says and I will question you and you shall declare to me. And you can read about God's response to Job in the bible.

Here I believe is the bottom line in the story of Job. Out of Job's experience with God, Job's struggle with God and his faith, out of dealing with some really hard questions Job grew closer in his relationship with God and grew in his faith to God. Listen to some of Job's words at the end of book of Job:

"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted... Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

Job after his encounter with God, dealing with some tough questions grew in his faith. I believe the same opportunity awaits us in the middle of our faith issues.

Another way to address any faith concerns we may be dealing with is to continue to work on some spiritual disciplines or perhaps start to work on some spiritual disciplines.

1 Timothy 4:7-8 "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."

Prayer and meditating on God's word, fasting and confessing sins, fellowship and self-examination, solitude and silence and the list goes on. All these things and others will help us in our faith journey.

If we are not practicing any of them now perhaps, we should consider practicing them. If we are practicing some of them perhaps, we should consider stepping up our game a little bit.

Either way as Timothy suggest our Christian lives should an element of spiritual training. Physical training is a good and necessary thing and spiritual training is also a good and necessary thing when it comes to faith issues.

Perhaps another thing that will help us in our faith journey and especially help us model to others concerning our faith is when we find ourselves in a situation where we are in effect back up against a wall, where we find ourselves in a position where we need to make a stand, where we need to tell others what we really believe in?

Philippians 1:27 *"Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."*

Sometimes just verbalizing, this is what I believe, helps restore some faith that we are missing. Believe, having faith in something is one thing, saying it out loud, maybe in an uncomfortable situation can help to cement what you really believe to be true, what you really have faith in. So, when that opportunity arrives, and I'm pretty sure it will for all of us, I believe it helps us to make a stand, to tell others what we truly believe. I believe doing such a thing will help us with any faith issues.

Finally, if we want to work on our faith, if we want to model to others perhaps how to work on their faith we must ultimately act in faithful ways. At some point in our faith journey, we will undoubtedly come to a place and time when we have to let go and let god. A time when we have to wait on God, A time when we finally realize no matter how hard it may be for us to get our heads around it, we, you and I, we are not in control. At that time, we, you and I can finally take a breath and out of faith, turn our troubles over to God.

. "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." -1 Peter 5:7

John Ortberg,

Most Christians who have walked with God for any length of time have experienced at least one crisis of faith. Elijah experienced such a crisis when Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him. On the run for his life, Elijah "came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors'. Here was a godly man struggling with depression and beginning to lose the vision of why he was serving God.

A. W. Tozer wrote, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply." Sometimes, we respond to that hurt with having a crisis of faith. But what feels to us like the end is often the beginning of a new chapter in our lives. A crisis of faith is sometimes necessary to shatter our childish illusions about God and discover who He really is.

A crisis of faith can bring us to the point of such desperation that we are willing to do things God's way, no matter the cost. To overcome a crisis of faith, we must surrender entirely to God's plan for us. To give God instructions about how our lives should go is to eventually suffer a crisis of faith when He does not follow our instructions. We may discover in our "dark night of the soul" that we had not given Him the wholehearted devotion He requires.

So those are some of my suggestions for working on our faith. We have been promised New Birth, in this world and the next world. We have been promised Living Hope in this world and in the next world. We know that in our heads, but sometimes we all struggle with it in our hearts. Faith holds it all together for us. Faith in Jesus Christ is the key. Let's continue to work on our faith for our sakes, for the sake of the generation of believers following us and for those not-yet believers around us. Amen.