

You don't need me to tell you that there is a world of people around us looking for hope. Perhaps you are one of them. This past Monday I sat in a chair next to a hurting person who asked me, "If a person commits suicide, can that person go to heaven?" Her question raised a yellow flag that said, "I need hope." Several weeks ago, I participated in a counseling session with a mother and her teenage daughter. They were in counseling because the girl had cut her wrists with a dull razor blade. As I looked at the wrists of that 13 year old, I knew that here was a young lady and a mother who needed hope. Is hope available?

Robert Lowry explains why there is hope with these lyrics, "Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes; He arose a Victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign, He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!"

On this Easter morning, we're going to talk about hope. What a great day to talk about hope! True hope is linked to three life-changing works accomplished by Jesus. In our study of God's Word, I invite you to look at the life of Jesus through the eyes of Peter.

How should we respond to the Risen Christ this morning? Peter can show us. What do we learn about Jesus from Peter's perspective? Peter wrote two epistles which interpret the significance of Christ's life for the followers of Christ. Hope is available to us because of what Jesus did. What did He do specifically?

Proposition: According to 1 Peter 3:18, hope is available to us because of three life-changing works which Jesus accomplished for us.

I. He lived the life we could never live.

A. He fulfilled the plan of God.

Key Word: "Christ"

1. His mission was unique (Mk 1:16-18).
2. His identify was unique (Mk 8:29).

B. He kept the Law of God.

Key Words: "The Just"

1. He loved God supremely (Mk 1:36).
2. He loved people selflessly (Mk 1:29; 5:37; 9:2).

II. He died the death we deserved to die.

A. He died as a sacrifice.

Key Words: "For sins" (Mk 8:31-33)

B. He died as a substitute.

Key Words: "For the unjust"

1. He took our place (Mk 14:36).
2. He took our penalty (Mk 14:54).
3. He took our punishment (Mk 15:34).

C. He died as a Savior.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Key Words: "That He might bring us to God"

1. He died to reconcile people to God.
2. He died to reconcile God to people (Mk 15:38).

III. He defeated the foe we could never defeat.

Key Words: "Made alive" (Mk 16:1-7)

Implications: Does God expect us to be perfect?

1. A holy God demands perfection.
2. We are not perfect, and can't be on our own.
3. Jesus is perfect.
4. We can be declared perfect through Him.

What did Jesus do that offers us hope today?

I. He lived the life we could never live.

Peter wrote 1 Peter for hurting, suffering Christians, for people in great need of hope. Hope is grounded in what Jesus did for us. 1 Pet 3:18 reads, "For Christ hath suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit." Jesus lived the life we could never live. How so? In two ways.

A. He fulfilled the plan of God.

Key Word: "Christ"

Think of the significance of that word--"Christ." You know that the term "Christ" comes from the Greek term "Christos" which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word "Meshiach" or "Messiah." When Jesus entered the scene 20 centuries ago, He came as the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. He came to fulfill the plan of God.

In what way did Jesus fulfill the plan of God? Let's answer that question by looking at the gospel account of Jesus through the eyes of Peter. You say, "But Peter never wrote an account of the life of Jesus." That's true. Even though He was one of Jesus' three inner-circle members, Peter never wrote a gospel. James didn't either, for he was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:2). James' brother John wrote the fourth gospel.

Though Peter didn't pen a gospel, however, most feel he had significant influence in the writing of one of the gospels. Which one? The gospel of Mark. In fact, Peter is mentioned in some 15 different scenes from Jesus' life, as recorded in Mark's narrative.

What stood out to Peter about Jesus? Keep a finger in 1 Peter, and turn back to Mark. There we'll see two factors related to Jesus' fulfillment of the plan of God.

1. His mission was unique (Mk 1:16-18).

Mark's gospel doesn't begin with the Christmas story. It begins with Jesus' public ministry as a 30 year old. Without going into detail, I want to merely point out the uniqueness of Jesus' mission. He came preaching (1:15), "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus broke into Simon's life in vv 16-17, and said, "Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

Later when Jesus changed Simon's name to "Peter" (see 3:16), Peter no doubt began to grasp the truth that Jesus' mission was unique. He had not come to patch up men's lives, but to change them. What gave Jesus that right?

2. His identify was unique (Mk 8:29).

Very few grasped the uniqueness of Jesus' identity, but by God's grace, Peter did. Remember what happened after the feeding of the 4,000? Check out Mk 8. While near the town of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples the question (8:27), "Who do men say that I am?" A variety of answers resulted. Then when asked, "But who say ye that I am?" guess who spoke up? Peter did, and replied (8:29), "Thou art the Christ." Don't miss that. "You are the Messiah. You are the long-awaited Deliverer."

See the connection in 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ also." Hope comes from Christ. Christ lived the life we could never live. How? First, He fulfilled the plan of God. Secondly...

B. He kept the Law of God.

Key Words: "The Just"

Don't overlook Peter's description of Christ in 3:18. What does he call Christ? "The Just." The word means righteous or perfect. Friend, never forget this. The cross was the greatest act of injustice ever committed on this planet. On the cross, the only person who ever lived a perfect life was executed as a hardened criminal. On the cross, the Just One suffered and died for unjust ones.

What does Peter mean when he calls Christ, "The Just One"? He has in mind the Law of God which Jesus kept perfectly. Remember Jesus said two commands sum up the Law: Love God, and love your neighbor. Jesus did both perfectly.

1. *He loved God supremely (Mk 1:36).*

We see an example of this in Mark 1. Jesus stayed up late healing the diseased and freeing the demon-possessed (34). The next morning Simon Peter went looking for Jesus, and said (37), "All men seek for Thee." But where was Jesus? Jesus wasn't interested in pleasing crowds. V 36 says He was in a solitary place praying to His Father. Why? Because He loved God supremely.

2. *He loved people selflessly (Mk 1:29; 5:37; 9:2).*

Peter saw this again and again as He watched Jesus. In Mk 1:29, he saw Jesus heal his mother-in-law. In Mk 5, when a synagogue ruler named Jairus had a sick daughter, he pleaded with Jesus to help. Jesus came, but on the way, the daughter died (5:35). Then Jesus permitted inner circle of Peter, James, and John to see something they would never forget (5:37)--they saw Jesus bring life back into the body of this dead girl. What incredible love Jesus exhibited for hurting people!

In Mark 9, Peter again was privileged, this time to see the transfiguration of Jesus. You remember the scene. Jesus took the three up on the mount, His appearance changed into brilliant purity before their very eyes, and Moses and Elijah appeared. Peter came up with an idea (9:5), "Master...let us make three booths; one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Simon's stumbling lips were silenced by a voice from heaven (9:7), "This is My beloved Son; hear Him."

The point is this. As Peter watched Jesus on the mount, and for three years, one thing was very apparent. Here was Someone Who was not merely a great man like Moses and Elijah. Here was One Who was unique. Here was One Who kept the Law of God perfectly. Unlike any other, He loved God supremely, and He loved people selflessly. So Peter calls Him, "The Just One."

Abe Lincoln once had a discussion with someone. He asked, "How many legs does a sheep have if you call the tail a leg?" The person replied, "Five." To which Lincoln responded, "No, four! Calling the tail a leg does not make it one!"

My friends, never forget this. We live in a society that tries to deal with sin by redefining and rationalizing it. There's no hope in that. Hope lies in the fact that Jesus did for us what we could never do. He lived a perfect life. Here is the key to hope for imperfect people. We have a perfect Savior!

II. He died the death we deserved to die.

Friday was what is commonly called "Good Friday." I want you to consider an important question. Why did Jesus die? In answer to that, there is great confusion in the world today. Willard Stull, our veteran missionary who has served in Brazil for over 50 years, made this comment in his recent prayer letter, "More than 100 million Brazilians BELIEVE that Jesus died on the cross. One sees a crucifix (body of Jesus on a cross) around necks, on walls, in taxis and many other places. When they say they believe, it is an acknowledgement of a fact." Listen. Not everyone that "believes" in Jesus is going to heaven. The Bible calls us to exhibit a very specific kind of belief related to the question I just posed. Why did Jesus die? Peter gives us three reasons why.

A. He died as a sacrifice.

Key Words: "For sins" (Mk 8:31-33)

V 18 "For Christ also hath ONCE (not over and over again) suffered (best mss have "died"; NIV) for sins." The word "for" lit. means "concerning," and was used in the description of sin-offerings in the Old Testament (Lev 5:6). Christ died as a sin-offering. He gave His life as a sacrifice for the sins of His people.

The first time Peter heard that, it was hard for him to swallow. In Mk 8, right after Peter uttered those words, "Thou art the Christ," Jesus began to teach His disciples (8:31) that He was going to suffer many things, be rejected by the Jewish leaders, be killed, and then resurrected after three days. Peter had a problem with such talk, and v 32 says he took Jesus, and began to rebuke Him! Don't miss the significance of Jesus' reply (8:33), "He rebuked Peter saying, Get thee behind me Satan; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." It was the plan of God that Jesus die--as a sacrifice.

B. He died as a substitute.

Key Words: "For the unjust"

Notice Peter's words again, "Christ suffered (died)...the just for the unjust." Camp on the word "for." It's a different Greek word than the one translated "for" in the phrase "for sins." Here, "for" in the unjust means "in behalf of." Jesus died as our substitute. The great doctrine of justification by faith rests on this truth. There are three implications of Christ's substitutionary death.

1. He took our place (Mk 14:36).

We saw this last week when we journeyed with Jesus to Gethsemane. Our Savior uttered this plea in Mk 14:36, "Take away this cup from Me." It was not death per se He feared. It was the cup of God's wrath. He was about to take our place.

2. He took our penalty (Mk 14:54).

What penalty? The unjust treatment that we deserved. Peter saw it from a distance (see Mk 14:54). While Peter was warming himself by the fire, Jesus was subjected to an unjust trial, to the mocking of cruel soldiers, to the horrid execution by crucifixion. But why? Because He willingly chose to take our penalty.

3. *He took our punishment (Mk 15:34).*

The climax of Jesus substitutionary death appears in Mk 15:34. It is there we hear the Savior cry out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is Aramaic for, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The punishment that Jesus took on the cross was hell itself, the very alienation from God we deserved.

I read the story about a little boy who was told by his doctor that he could save his sister's life by giving her some blood. He had the same rare blood type she needed. The doctor asked, "Johnny, would you like to give your blood for Mary?" The boy hesitated, his lip trembled then smiled, and he said, "Sure Doc, I'll give my blood for my sister." While in the operating room, the air was quiet as Johnny's blood was siphoned into his sister's veins, until Johnny's voice broke the silence, "Say Doc, when do I die?" It was only then that the doctor realized why the boy had hesitated. Little Johnny thought that in giving his blood, he was giving up his life (Coleman, 36).

Oh beloved, Jesus not only was willing to die, He did die--as our substitute.

C. He died as a Savior.

Key Words: "That He might bring us to God"

The phrase "bring us to God" was a technical term that meant "gain an audience at court." Don't miss the implications. What Jesus did on the cross made it possible for us to have open access to God!

1. *He died to reconcile people to God.*

2. *He died to reconcile God to people (Mk 15:38).*

How do we know that's true? God gave His people a visual aid lesson the day Christ died. Mark records it in Mk 15:37-38, "And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the spirit. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom." It is not incidental that it tore from top to bottom. God tore it. The veil that had been a continual reminder that unholy people cannot come into the presence of a holy God was removed! How? By the work of the Savior!

On June 30, 1966, a group of American soldiers was on a reconnaissance mission in Vietnam, when suddenly they were attacked by a Viet Cong regiment. An enemy grenade landed nearby. Sergeant Donald Long (from Oak Hill, Ohio) shouted a warning to the crew and even pushed to safety one man who had not heard his cry. When he realized that the roar of the battle prevented many from hearing his words, Sergeant Long threw his body over the grenade, absorbed the blast, and saved the lives of eight comrades at the expense of his own life. That's sacrifice.

Yet what Jesus did is beyond human comprehension. He not only lived the perfect life we could not live, He also died the death we deserved to die. Now listen carefully. As great as these two works were, they would be futile without the third.

III. He defeated the foe we could never defeat.

Key Words: "Made alive" (Mk 16:1-7)

1 Pt 3:18 tells us, "Being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit." What was man's greatest foe? Death. What event defeated this great foe? The resurrection of Christ! Christ conquered death.

One of the most dramatic announcements in the Scriptures appears in Mk 16:6. An angel was in the empty tomb of Jesus, and said this to the women, "Be not amazed. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified; He is risen; He is not here. Behold the place where they laid Him." Now watch this. Who really needed hope at this point? Who had denied Jesus three times? Peter had. V 7 "But go your way, tell His disciples AND PETER..."

Frankly, the Peter you read about in the book of Acts is a very different man from the Peter in the gospels. What happened? He came to grips with the three life-changing works of Jesus. He knew that Jesus lived the perfect life he could never live. He knew that Jesus died the death he deserved to die. He also knew that Jesus defeated the foe he could never defeat. What about you? Are you in need of hope? Have you ever acknowledged that what Jesus did, He did for you?

Implications: Does God expect us to be perfect?

If I took a poll today on this question, I am sure most people would say, "No, surely God doesn't expect us to be perfect, does He?" Please listen carefully. If the answer is "no," then Jesus died in vain. If God merely winks at sin, and says, "Ah, no big deal," then what Jesus endured was ludicrous. But the facts are these.

1. A holy God demands perfection.

Jesus said in Mt 5:48, "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." Peter himself wrote these words in 1 Pt 1:15, "But as He who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of life."

2. We are not perfect, and can't be on our own.

James 2:10 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." A holy God demands perfection. Is there hope for us?

3. Jesus is perfect.

1 Pt 2:22 says this concerning Jesus, "Who did no sin." In 1 Pt 1:19, Peter called Jesus "a lamb without blemish and without spot." Here's the good news.

4. We can be declared perfect through Him.

I remember when one of my daughters was about 3 1/2 years old. We were in the house together. She looked into the air and said, "What's that?" I couldn't tell at first but then realized she was looking at speckles of dust hanging in the air, illuminated by the sun's rays. "Dust," I told her. She said, "I've never seen that before." I responded, "Oh, the dust is always there but it takes the sun to make it visible." My friends, that's the way it is with the dust spots of sin in our lives. We may not think too much of them, until we're in the presence of the Son of God.

How can we experience the hope and help of God? By taking to heart 1 Peter 3:18. Christ lived the life we could never live. He died the death we deserved; and that He conquered the foe we could never defeat.