

I imagine the days after Jesus' resurrection and Pentecost were pretty euphoric:  
It must have been really exciting  
As people began to understand the truth,  
As lives were changed  
As the church grew so rapidly

More than 500 people saw Jesus rise from the dead,  
1,000s were giving their life to him; and  
we are told that the Church enjoyed the favour of all the people.  
What an amazing time to be a Christian!

It didn't last  
Within years persecution had broken out  
Christians were shunned, abused, bullied, jailed and killed by the 100s.  
Within two decades the persecution by the Jews **was nothing** in comparison  
to the cruelty of the Romans.  
By the time Nero took control  
Christians were being burnt alive, nailed to trees and sawn in two... for sport.

From the outside, the dream had become a nightmare  
and the question that would have been on so many people's lips was  
*where are you God when all this is happening?*  
*How come you are letting good people suffer so much?*

This is still one of the most frequently asked questions today  
*Why does a good God allow bad things to happen to good people?*  
*Why do disasters happen?*  
*why do diseases go unhealed?*  
*why do tragic accidents occur in the lives of those we love?*

These are real questions, and  
if we haven't asked cried out to God with them yet, we most certainly will.

When we give our lives to God it can feel like we have found the purpose and the reason for everything  
but then,  
maybe something happens  
maybe prayers go unanswered  
maybe something absolutely senseless, useless, random hurts someone we love  
And that illusion of knowing how things work – gets shattered

The world seems meaningless again  
And we ask  
*"God if you are good and powerful – then why don't you do something about this!"*

This is the context that Peter is writing to.  
This is the question that I want to talk about tonight  
This is something that we all need to consider...  
before the darkness comes, before the storms hit, before the disappointment destroys our faith.

So I want to say three things tonight.  
That when we face of trials of many kinds  
we need to look forward  
we need to look back; and then  
we need to look deeper.

We need to look forward, we need to look back and we need to look deeper.  
So Peter tells us, firstly

### **1. We need to look forward.**

In 1 Peter 1v3 Peter begins by saying

*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.*

After the salutation, Peter's opening lines, to these bitterly persecuted Christians, was

#### **1.1 Jesus' resurrection gives us a "living hope"...**

As Chris said last week

not just an old hope "pepped up a bit" – but a new living hope!

When Jesus rose from the dead he wasn't merely resuscitated,  
his old body wasn't simply put back together and then given a bit of a boost  
He was resurrected.

He was resurrected with an immortal body, with a new body, with a glorious body.  
It was a taste of things to come.

When Jesus was resurrected  
a piece of heaven appeared on a piece of earth  
the kingdom of God entered the kingdom of this world  
The future punched a hole into the "here and now"  
God set up a beach-head of hope in people's lives

With the resurrection of Jesus  
immortality broke into our world of decay  
a shaft of light pierced the darkness; and  
new hope came into people's suffering.

For the truth is, that when we put our faith in Jesus and make him our Lord  
the Kingdom of God enters our life, never to leave  
the Kingdom of God forms a beach-head in our lives.

And when Jesus says "put your trust in me", "place your faith in me"  
he says, "do it" because you will receive resurrection hope into your life,  
God will establish a beach-head of his presence in your world.

Eternity will break in  
Hope will never leave.

It is v4 *an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you,*

And as we follow Christ  
And as our relationship with him grows  
That Beach-head, that which started off as something small / a glimpse / a glimmer / a toe-hold,  
becomes more and more and more real,  
more and more influential,  
and nothing in this world can take it from you  
*not death nor life, neither angels nor demons,  
neither the present nor the future,  
neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,  
can separate you from the love of God that has taken a hold in your life*

Everyone of you who is a Christian here has that hope.  
And you need to look forward to it because

### **1.2 that hope swallows suffering whole.**

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul talks about death and suffering being “swallowed up in victory”!  
He doesn't just say they are removed. He says they're swallowed up.

*If you have a piece of cake on the table.  
I know of only two ways of making it disappear.  
One is to remove it.  
The other is to swallow it.  
And if you swallow it, then (as I am becoming more and more aware) it makes you bigger, and stronger, and  
it feeds your life  
If you swallow something it becomes a part of you,  
It enhances you.*

When Jesus rose again, his wounds were still visible.  
That which he had suffered could still be seen as part of him.

Yet those wounds no longer spoke of men's hate – they spoke of God's love  
That which was meant to be his shame (the crucifixion) is now his glory  
That which had been meant to silence him - broadcasts his gospel to the world  
You see God can do that!

God is bigger than all the suffering in your world  
And final miracle that he will perform in your life, is for your resurrection to swallow all your suffering.

You ask how?  
Well imagine, you've lost something you love,  
You've searched everywhere and you haven't been able to find it  
and then weeks later – whilst you're still missing it / still looking for it / still fretting about it  
- you find it!  
Don't you appreciate it more,  
don't you cherish it more,  
don't you treasure it more now that you have found it!  
Yes. And all because it was lost!  
The sorrow and frustration that you felt is now swallowed up and compounds your delight!

We lost Miriam on the beach when she was about 3.  
I don't forget it  
After the initial search  
it became ten minutes of sheer panic, of utter sickness...  
as we frantically searched  
the rocks, the shore line, even the waves (God no) for a body...

When we found her – the fear was swallowed up in relief  
the heart-ache compounded our joy  
Some-how, like this and better, our resurrection swallows suffering.

That is why, amidst the pain of this world  
Peter tells us “we need to keep looking forward”.  
Keep hoping, keep trusting, take hold of that which has already taken hold of you.  
For your hope will get you through

## **2. But then he also says that “we need to look back too”.**

*v5 who through faith are shielded by God's power ... though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*

The resurrection of Jesus forms a beach-head of God's Kingdom in our life  
But like any beach-head the cost to establish it was immense.  
*In the film “Saving Private Ryan” Steven Spielberg showed the horror of the D-Day landings in World War 2*  
*It is something that I would have shown you tonight, but the images are just **too** harrowing*  
The cost of establishing those beach-heads was immense.

When we look back, at what it cost God to create his beach-head in our life  
that which shields us from the full consequences of sin  
We see, that IT's cost was immense and

### **2.1 SO we can KNOW,... that God knows,... what we are going through.**

When WE feel isolated – we look at Jesus on the cross and we realise that he knows what isolation really is  
When we are betrayed by those we have loved – he knows  
When we are denied justice – he knows  
When someone abuses us *without remorse* – he knows  
When our life is cut short and we lose the years of promise – he knows  
When we never marry, never have children, never hold our grand-children – he knows  
When we cry out “Oh God why”, “why does it feels like you have forsaken me !!” - he knows.

Jesus knows what it is like to be physically, psychologically, spiritually – abandoned and tortured.  
Do you think Satan did not use every trick in the book to hurt Jesus when he was most vulnerable?  
Do you think Satan didn't kicked Jesus was he was down?  
When Jesus was EXCRUTIATED – The Devil was pressing down on his back as hard as he could!”  
He knows!

Even though Hitler's fate was sealed the moment the Allied troops established the beach-heads at Normandy  
That didn't mean to say that the soldiers stopped dying  
that friends were no longer blown to smithereens; or  
that days of hard fighting and suffering did not still lie before them.

Jesus' death forms a beach-head

But that doesn't mean to say that there are not days and even years of struggle and hard fighting / suffering  
ahead of us.

*though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*

Satan is beaten, but the bodies will still fall.

He has lost, but tragedies still strike

**But** as we look back

We know that God knows and then

## **2.2 We SEE that we are not alone.**

Peter says: suffering is like being refined by fire, he says

*v7 sufferings have come, so that your faith – which is of greater worth than gold - which perishes even  
though refined by fire - may be proved genuine*

He says: suffering is like a furnace that purifies gold.

Now that's a common biblical metaphor and there is a whole series of sermons in that

but I just want to take one idea which is

although it is a metaphor –

we can look back and see that one time in the Bible it literally happened.

Some believer's faith was literally tested by being thrown into a furnace

It happened in the book of Daniel

When 3 young men refused to worship an idol of King Nebuchadnezzar

This so upset the King that he had a furnace stoked as hot as it could get

It became so hot that when the guards went to throw the Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into it –

it was too hot for them to survive

They threw the three men of faith into the fire: tied and bound.

But when King Nebuchadnezzar went to see them die

what he saw amazed him.

He said in Daniel 3v25

*“For there in the fire are not three men, but four, walking, unbound and unharmed and the fourth looks like  
a Son of God”.*

You know in Isaiah chapter 43, God promises us something. He says

*when you pass through the waters I will be there with you; and*

*when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you; and*

***when you walk through the fires you will not be burned.***

The promise is NOT, **it is certainly is not**, that

“I promise you, you will NEVER go through deep waters or be tested by fire” – he doesn't say that,

And neither does he say “IF – if you go through fire”

He says “WHEN”,  
when you go through,  
when you are plunged into the fiery furnace  
I will **so** care about you, and I will **so** love you, and you will be **so** able to trust promise  
that “I will be walking with you” – and

when we see that, that God himself is walking with us (AND THAT HE KNOWS what it feels like)  
then we will see that we will not be consumed  
the trouble and trial will not destroy us  
it will not turn us hard  
it will not break us  
And then we realise (to our astonishment)

### **2.3 How valuable we are to God**

When we look back at the cross – we see that God considers our faith –  
*v7 of greater worth than Gold – yes*  
but MORE of greater worth than even his very own life!

Go to the cross and ask the question  
“God why are you allowing this suffering to happen in my life”.  
And even though the cross will not give you an answer  
it will tell you what the answer ISN'T,

It can't tell us what the answer IS, but  
It can tell us “what it CAN'T be”  
It **can't be** that he doesn't love you and  
it can't be that he doesn't care for you and  
it can't be that he doesn't understand what you are going through.

We can't always know why he has allowed suffering into our life  
But we CAN know that he loves us with a passion  
AND we CAN know He IS walking right next to us,  
AND we can know, that He knows what it is like  
So we need to keep looking back; and  
We need to keep looking forward with hope; and

### **3. We also need to keep looking deeper.**

Peter says

*v7 These have come so that your faith may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

If we look on the surface, if our analysis is shallow and we reject God  
then the logical conclusion is,  
as Richard Dawkins so clearly said in his book River our of Eden  
that we live in a “*pitiless universe, with no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference*”.

Look on the surface and we ARE all alone, there is no purpose, there is no hope

Dawkins says “Nature is neither kind nor cruel but simply indifferent to your plight – it just doesn’t care. We are inconsequential to it”

But look deeper, look forward, look back, look back to even before the beginning of time. And understand that God thinks it is worth it, it is SO worth it.

Look when God made the world – he knew everything that would happen  
And if that is true then it is obvious that  
**he knew that all the suffering in the world would be worth it.**

So when God, before time, saw Jesus sweating agonies in Gethsemane  
when he saw him being humiliated  
when he saw him being crucified even,  
when he saw all the atrocities of humanity’s inhumanity heaped on Jesus  
He knew, without a shadow of a doubt that it was worth it.

Not worth it because  
we diminish the gravity of the pain or the bone deep sadness or the soul destroying loss that we may feel in this world  
But “worth it” because “our present troubles are not worth comparison to the inexpressible glory that will be revealed to us”.

Not worth it because, we minimise our suffering  
but worth it because we maximise the glory that will be revealed **to us**.  
It is SO far beyond our hopes and imagining.

You see “suffering” invites us to look deeper and further than just the glory of this world –  
This is what Jesus did: “He saw a deeper glory”  
and for it  
he abandoned heaven  
he faced Gethsemane; and  
he endured the cross

He (as Hebrews 12 says) for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorned its shame and sat down at the right hand of God”  
What was that joy?  
What deeper secret enabled him to endure HIS Fiery Furnace?  
what drove his life, and directed his path and captivated his dreams?  
What was HIS living hope?

Well it wasn’t “being in heaven with his Father” for he already had that  
No, something caused him to put that down.

What was missing in heaven that he didn’t already have?  
The answer is you.

You are the only thing that he didn’t have in heaven  
You are what God made the universe for

You are enough to make him come down and go to the cross.

YOU.

You glorified, You in your future:

beautified, unspoilt, unfading, perfect, restored, glorified

You, in his hands.

You are what fills the Father heart of God with joy,

You see “suffering” invites us to look deeper and further than just the glory of this world –  
to what you are already receiving:

a developing relationship with the living God.

The Cross and Heaven will not give us answers for “why ‘suffering happens in our life”

But it will drive us to a deeper trust

It will cause us to seek a deeper relationship

It will make us release the world and hold onto God even tighter

And thus it will make us immovable in life’s storms

Emotionally, Spiritually: Solid, Stable, Stronger and Dependable.

and then you will be able to walk through the furnace.

and so v8 even though

*you have not seen him, you love him; and*

*even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and*

because you have made him – forever, your living hope

*you will be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,*

*for you ARE receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

It is happening in you.

The Beach-head is already spreading out across your life

trust him, look forward, look back, look deeper and

and you will shine like stars in the darkness –

more beautiful than even polished gold.