

I've traveled out of state a decent amount the last year, and one of the things that has stood out to me is that people keep talking to me about how cool it must be to live in Indiana with all the recent sports success! The Pacers went to the finals. The Colts were on top of the AFC for a while. We've got Caitlin Clark. IU was the number one team in the country. People are giving me all these reasons to love where I live! It's an exciting time to be from Indiana.

I want to draw a connection to our passage today. Peter is writing this letter to Christians, and the first thing he talks about after the greeting is that they have so much to celebrate, so much to be excited about and grateful for. Of course, he isn't celebrating their geography or their local sports team. All his focus is on God, and what he has done for us through his son. Peter kicks off his letter with these words: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Peter 1:3). He says praise to God should constantly be flowing from their lives, and then in the following verses, he spells out several compelling reasons why God should be praised. Today, as we continue our study of 1 Peter, we are going to look at three reasons we should praise God—and it's all about what he has done for us through Jesus!

We praise God because we have a living and lasting hope through Jesus.

Look at how this is spelled out in the opening verses: "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3b-4).

Peter kicks off his letter by reminding these new Christians of the hope they have in Jesus! Psychologists have done an immense amount of research on the essentiality of hope in the last century. They say hope gives the brain power to project itself into the future and conceive of a better reality. Focusing on that better reality gives people the ability to live differently in the present—to regulate their emotions, endure hardship, and make wise decisions. Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, observed that prisoners didn't die first from starvation or brutality, but from loss of hope. He said, "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future was doomed." Admiral James Stockdale, a U.S. Navy pilot, spent over seven years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. Because he spent so long in a prison camp, he was asked the difference between those who survived and those who perished. He said the people who didn't make it out were the optimists, the one who said, "we'll get out soon...we'll be out next month...we'll be home by Christmas." When their predictions failed, they collapsed emotionally. Then he said those who survived weren't pessimists; rather, "those who survived had disciplined hope." They weren't chasing a mirage or a carrot at the end of a stick. They knew things were going to be hard, maybe hard for a long time, but they were confident that they would eventually overcome.

Peter says if you believe in Jesus, you not only have hope, you have "a living hope"! He says our hope is living "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from dead." Our hope is not blind optimism. It's not mental gymnastics. Our hope is grounded in the historic reality that Jesus conquered the grave. If Jesus conquered the grave, if his life overcame death, then Jesus really is Lord of the universe, and one day, what happened in that tomb outside of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago will happen for us, and will happen for the entire world. Jesus descended into the bleakest and most hopeless situation—

death on a cross and a cold, dark tomb—but he conquered it. Because he was victorious there, we have unshakable hope everywhere! Wherever there is sickness and death, God's power and life will overcome. Wherever there is deterioration and decay, God will make all things new!

No matter the storms we go through in life, this hope grounds us! Listen to what we read in Hebrews 6:19-20a: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.” This is reminding us of the ancient Jewish temple, which had at its very center the holy of holies. It was separated from the rest of the temple by a curtain. Only the high priest could go into the holy of holies, and only once a year. It was the holiest place on earth, containing the very presence of God. But what are we told in this passage? Our hope, Jesus Christ, has gone into the inner sanctuary—not the one on earth, but the one in heaven (the earthly one of which is just a shadow). Jesus is in heaven, at the right hand of the Father, where his blood atones for our sins, he intercedes for our needs, and he is ruling as King of kings and Lord of Lords, and no one can remove him from his rightful place! He is “an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” If you are on a boat and the wind starts moving fast, you’ll get pushed all around the lake. But if you drop anchor, and the anchor is firm and secure, no matter how intense the winds get, no matter what happens on the surface of the water, you won’t move. If you hold onto that anchor, you are firm and secure. That’s what happens when our hope is in Jesus! He is our living hope.

But we also have a lasting hope. Peter says our inheritance will never “perish, spoil or fade” and that this inheritance is kept in heaven for us. He’s bringing out the thesaurus, using every word in his arsenal, to say that our hope in Jesus will last; it has no expiration date. It’s like the great hymn “Amazing Grace” says: “When we’ve been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first began.” I have some dear friends who have lost people this week. One of the women on our staff lost her dad. One of my friends from college lost his wife after a long fight with cancer. I can’t even describe the joy and the strength that defies explanation they have displayed. It’s a joy and strength that can only come from a hope that is truly eternal! As Christians, our hope is not that this world is going to get better, but that God is going to remake this world. Jesus is going to recreate this world!

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:2-5)

That is our hope. That is our eternal inheritance!

We praise God because we have a resilient and relational faith in Jesus.

Let’s look at how Peter continues his letter.

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. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you

may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 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. 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, or you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:5-9)

Before we talk about faith being resilient and relational, we must first know what faith is. One of the clearest and most helpful definitions of faith is found in Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” In 2 Corinthians 5:7 we read, “We live by faith, not by sight.” In John 20:29 Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (have faith).” In each of these passages, faith is contrasted with sight. When you can see something, when you can take it to the lab and put it under the microscope, when you can empirically verify it with your senses, no faith is involved; you know it for a fact. But faith requires belief. It’s not contradictory to fact or reason; it just requires deeper analysis. If you asked me if Mike was at church today, that doesn’t require any faith. I can look at him and know with certainty he is here. But faith is about things that cannot be seen. If you are sick and go to a doctor, you don’t know for certain that she is giving you the right advice, but you have a reason to trust that she knows what she is talking about and has your best interest in mind. You can’t know for sure, but you decide you can believe in her.

Every person who has ever lived has to make a decision about believing in Jesus. It’s not blind faith; it considers everything that you can see—the universe, life itself, morality, truth, the Scriptures, historical accounts, eyewitness testimony, other people’s experiences, your own experiences. Sooner or later everybody must decide if they believe that God is real, and that they can have a relationship with him through trusting in his Son, Jesus Christ. That’s faith. Faith matters so much to God. Look at the way Peter describes faith in our passage: “your faith—of greater worth than gold.” Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Bible only tells us Jesus was amazed on two occasions: at the abundance of someone’s faith, and at the lack of someone’s faith. Faith matters to God!

When Peter talks about faith, he highlights that it’s “a resilient faith.” Faith isn’t always easy because life gets hard. Cancer hits. Chronic pain won’t go away. Infertility issues persist. Financial troubles continue. Our loved ones die. Christians don’t have faith because life is always good. Christians have faith because God is real and God is good, and God is real and God is good even when life is hard. That’s resilient faith. Peter says that the trials and fires we go through are like when precious metal is placed in the forge. That fire melts away all the impurities, so that only the precious metal remains. Hardships don’t strip away true faith; they strengthen it. Peter knew this. He endured decades of hardship because of his faith. He was imprisoned again and again. At the end of his life, he would be killed for his faith. Did he stop believing because life was hard? No; he said, “If you are going to crucify him, crucify me upside down, because I don’t deserve to die in the same manner as my king.” He had faith that was so resilient, no hardship could harm it.

But it’s not just resilient faith; it’s a relational faith. Our belief in God isn’t abstract and conceptual; it’s intimate and personal. Peter says: “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” (1 Peter 1:8). Faith in God isn’t about agreeing to a set of doctrines or assenting to specific creeds; it’s about love for God. When we love someone we cannot see, though it’s impossible to quantify, our hearts are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy. I think I have one of the best wives in the world; I

feel so close to her. I think I have three of the best kids in the world; I feel so close to them. I think I have some of the best friends in the world; I feel so close to them. I know this may sound strange if you are just exploring the faith, but as close as I am to all these people, I feel closer to Jesus than anyone. I have loved him my entire life. Of all the joy I get from all those people, I get more joy from him. Faith is not about a set of ideas. God is a person. He knows you and loves you. He wants you to know him and love him, too.

That's why we named our third child Luke. The other three gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, and John, all met Jesus. They all knew Jesus. They were all with him at key points of his life. Not Luke. Luke was a Gentile. Luke lived in a different part of the world. Luke never personally met Jesus. But he heard the gospel and believed in Jesus. He was a doctor, well-trained and educated. After coming to faith, he spent the rest of his life getting to know everything he possibly could about Jesus. He put down the stethoscope and picked up the pen, writing the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts so that other people like him who had never met Jesus could come to believe in him, just like he did. We want our son to be like that. This side of heaven, our son will never see Jesus. But we want these words to be true of him: "Though you have not seen him, you love him" (1 Peter 1:8a), and your life helps others to come to love him as well. At its core, faith is personal. We praise God because we have a resilient and relational faith in Jesus.

We have foretold and fulfilled promises about Jesus.

One of the reasons we have so much faith in Jesus is because his life was the perfect fulfillment of prophecies made about him hundreds of years before his birth. Every aspect and detail of Jesus' life was written about in prophecy centuries before Jesus came.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. (1 Peter 1:10-12)

For hundreds, even thousands, of years before Jesus was born, God had been preparing the world with details of the Messiah who would come. There are forty-eight Old Testament prophecies in total, and every one of them was perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. I shared this list with you over a year ago and have had many requests to share it again.

The OT prophets tell us that Jesus would:

- Be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
- Come from the line of Abraham (Genesis 22:18) and more specifically be a descendant of Judah (Genesis 49:10), and, even more precisely, be from the household of David (2 Samuel 7:12).
- Be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- Be presented at his birth with gifts from leaders who traveled from distant lands and would bow down to him (Psalm 72:10).

- Escape to Egypt for safety (Hosea 11:1) after an evil king, to protect his throne, killed the babies of Bethlehem (Jeremiah 31:15).
- Claim to be God with us (Isaiah 7:14).
- Be a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:18), a priest (Psalm 110:4) and a king (Psalm 2:6).

The Scriptures predicted that he would:

- Begin his ministry in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1).
- Perform many miracles (Isaiah 35:6).
- Teach in parables (Psalm 78:2).
- Enter Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

On the day of his crucifixion, more than twenty prophecies were fulfilled in one day! The Bible foretold that:

- Jesus would be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9) for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12).
- The silver would be thrown into God's house and used to buy a Potter's field (Zechariah 11:13).
- In the hours before Jesus' death, he would
 - Be abandoned by his friends (Zechariah 13:7).
 - Be accused by false witnesses (Psalm 35:11)
 - Stand silent before his accusers (Isaiah 53:7)
 - Be mocked by those around him (Psalm 22:7).
 - Be wounded and bruised (Isaiah 53:5).
 - Be beaten and spat upon (Isaiah 50:6).
 - Have his garments split up and gambled for (Psalm 22:18).
 - Physically stagger under the weight of his affliction (Psalm 109:24).
- At Jesus' death his hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16).
- Jesus' side would be pierced (Zechariah 12:10).
- Jesus would be executed together with criminals (Isaiah 53:12).
- Jesus would experience great thirst (Psalm 69:21).
- Jesus would pray for his persecutors (Isaiah 53:12).
- Despite great physical travail not one of Jesus' bones would be broken (Psalm 34:20).
- Jesus would die at midday and during the hour of his death darkness would miraculously descend upon the earth (Amos 8:9).
- Jesus would then be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9).
- Then Jesus would be resurrected to the father's right hand and he would pour out gifts on his followers (Psalm 16:10-11 and 68:18).

Statisticians have said that the likelihood of one person randomly fulfilling even 20% of these prophecies is the same degree of likelihood of a tornado rolling through a junk yard and randomly assembling a fully functioning 747. It's just not possible! So we praise God that he told us in advance what he was going to do, that he did it, and that we can look back with confidence and know that Jesus really is the Son that God sent to save the world!

We have so many reasons to praise God! Hope through Jesus. Faith in Jesus. Promises about Jesus. If this is true—then praise isn't optional. It's the only fitting response.