



Praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Psalm 146



I know that my Redeemer lives —
what joy the blest assurance gives !
He lives, he lives, who once was dead ;
he lives, my everlasting Head !

He lives, to bless me with his love ;
he lives, to plead for me above ;
he lives, my hungry soul to feed ;
he lives, to help in time of need.

He lives, and grants me daily breath ;
he lives, and I shall conquer death ;
he lives, my mansion to prepare ;
he lives, to lead me safely there.

He lives, all glory to his name ;
he lives, my Saviour, still the same ;
what joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives !

Samuel Medley (1738–1799)

Let us pray.

Lord God, we praise you that in Christ all our
'ends' become his 'new beginnings' and all our
weaknesses are clothed in his strength.

Lord, we praise you that in Christ our times of
emptiness are filled with hope, and our
brokenness has found the only source of
peace and wholeness.

Lord, we praise you that in Christ your
damaged world can be restored, and its
people discover the joy and freedom to be all
that you intended them to be.

Lord, we praise you that in Christ the joy of
heaven bursts into our days and hours, and by
your Holy Spirit the things of earth find their
centre and purpose in him.

Lord, we praise you that in Christ our lives
receive a purpose vast and wide. As we come
together to worship you from our homes, may
we be united in our praise, joyful in your
presence and know that you hold us together
as your church.

Amen.



Powerful in making us wise to salvation,
witness to faith in Christ Jesus the Word ;
breathed out for all by the life-giving Father —
these are the scriptures, and thus speaks the
Lord.

Hammer for action and compass for travel,
map in the desert and lamp in the dark ;
teaching, rebuking, correcting and training —
these are the scriptures, and this is their work.

Prophecy, history, song and commandment,
gospel and letter and dream from on high ;
words of the wise who were steered by the
Spirit —

these are the scriptures ; on them we rely.
Gift for God's servants to fit them completely,
fully equipping to walk in his ways ;
guide to good work and effective believing —
these are the scriptures ; for these we give
praise !

Christopher Idle (b. 1938)

1 Peter – Introduction

Peter is writing to small groups of Christians
scattered all over what we would now call
Turkey. His greatest desire appears to be that
they live well as God's people in a very
challenging world. Therefore this letter is one
that aims to give confidence in lots of ways.
Although the majority of Christians he is
writing to would not have been Jews, Peter
calls upon that heritage and so draws them
into the continuing story of God's intention for
the world.

Christians in Turkey lived in a society where the gospel was thought to be total nonsense, and dangerous nonsense at that. They faced a constant challenge to their faith and would no doubt have asked themselves why they should keep to it when so many others rubbished it? The letter from Peter was to encourage them and to give them confidence in the gospel and in their faith.

1 Peter 1:1-12 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Salutation

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood:

May grace and peace be yours in abundance.

A Living Hope

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷ so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁸ Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, ¹¹ inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ

and the subsequent glory. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!

Reflection

Peter's greeting acknowledges the situation that the groups of Christians are in, describing them as exiles. This suggests both his deep concern and his respect for them holding fast to the faith, while in very difficult circumstances. It also links them into the greater story of God's people throughout history.

These Christians are not in totally uncharted territory when it comes to the story of God's people. There are many accounts of God's people suffering in exile in the Old Testament. So straight away Peter seeks to reassure them that they are a people who belong to God. God chose them and sanctified them by the Holy Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ.

Two hymns come to my mind at this early point in the letter. Firstly, John Newton's hymn *Amazing Grace*. In that first verse we sing these words:

*Amazing grace – how sweet the sound –
that saved a wretch like me!*

And Charles Wesley's hymn:

*And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
died he for me ...?*

Both hymns express the joy and wonder that the Lord our God, creator of the world, is interested in them. Or, when we sing it, interested in us. Of all the people in all the world, God who is beyond our imagining comes close to us as individual people.

Whilst there are many traits in British culture, one of them is never wanting to put ourselves forward. There is an almost natural inclination to shy away from the limelight. Yet God in Christ still seeks us out. Many people still struggle to understand that even today, Jesus still seeks us out, because he loves us and considers us important enough to bother with.

So here, in Peter's letter, this is where he begins, reminding them of the extent of God's love by seeking them out. This says beyond doubt that God is with them.

Just as the events of Good Friday were not the end of the story, so Peter points them to something even more amazing in the promise of eternal life. The hope of Easter Day is about the possibilities created of not just a daily relationship with God, but a living eternal presence with God. It gives a real and living hope for the future.

Yet I really appreciate that Peter is honest. Yes we grapple with the notion of God being interested in us, and with the hope of an inheritance beyond words that will not perish or spoil or fade. But that doesn't make everything easy. Peter acknowledges that there will be times when life isn't easy.

Just because we believe in Jesus does not mean that we can live on cloud nine for our whole lives. There is a gritty reality that we must contend with here, in our lifetime on earth.

In these times of Covid-19, it is heartening to hear for once, that the government and others are starting to praise the work of carers, hospital cleaners, all those who work for the NHS and other key workers. Suddenly, their jobs have been hailed as great and noble occupations. Yet for many of these, their pay remains at the lower end of the scale. Life isn't easy.

Peter acknowledges that there will be suffering and trials. For those to whom he is writing, a major part of their struggle is their determination to worship and declare their faith.

Do we find it easy to share our faith? To be confident in what we believe?

Peter is confident that because of their challenges, because it is not easy, their faith has been proved to be great and genuine. He places a value on it far beyond any wealth that can be earned on earth in their lifetime.

Verse 8 particularly brings us into this same story: *"⁸ Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy."*

I cannot remember an Easter Sunday when I have not been worshipping in one church or another. So this year has felt very strange indeed, and yet the indescribable and glorious joy of Easter was all the more real, despite us not being together.

It is not just that Peter assures us of the gospel truths. We know them deep within our hearts, and this time of social distancing has made them real once again. The joy of our risen Lord Jesus, lives within us.

May that joy overflow in our hearts and lives and give us the confidence to continue the Easter shout. Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.

Let us pray.

Lord, in these uncertain times, help us to know the power of the risen Christ, and assure us once more of his love for us and for all people everywhere.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for those on the front line of the world's response to Covid-19. We give you thanks and praise for those willing to put their lives at risk to treat others.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord we pray for your church dispersed across the world, unable to be physically together to worship you, yet united in the joy of Easter and the promises that you give to us. May the contact we do have with one another and those who we meet raise the spirits of those who are lonely and afraid.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, you said that you came to give us life in abundance, and yet it feels as though our lives are so restricted. Give us the confidence to hold onto that Easter hope, that Easter joy, and give to us the courage to share your good news.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for our families, those who are well and those who are struggling with their health, physical or mental.

We pray for those who cannot be with us, who we would naturally want to come alongside and support. May they know we are with them in spirit as you are at their side.

We pray for all who feel helpless and lost.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We take a moment to pray for those known to us who need our prayers.

Loving God, we join these and all our prayers together in the words Jesus taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.



Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King ;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.

*King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.*

Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,

and a hope yet to come :
let the nations put their trust in him.

King of heaven, we will answer the call ...

*Keith Getty (b. 1974),
Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and
Stuart Townend (b. 1963)*

The God we worship is our strength and our song.

The God we serve is our courage and our reward.

The God we trust is our hope and our joy.

May the blessing of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day, now and always.

Amen.





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