

A life of hope in the midst of trials

1. Intro [SLIDE]

- On Friday morning the world awoke to the tragic news that Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 travelling from Amsterdam to KL had crashed in the Ukraine killing all 295 passengers on board
- Reports quickly followed saying the plane was accidentally shot down by a surface to air missile ... apparently mistaken for a military or transport aircraft

- You can't imagine the shock and anger and anguish the families of all those victims would have felt when they first heard that news
 - and will continue to feel ... as they try to deal with such a tragedy over the coming weeks and months

- How do you deal with situations like that?
 - Whether it be the
 - tragic loss of a loved one > air crash, drowning, sudden heart attack
 - dealing with bullying in the workplace
 - diagnosed with a terminal illness
 - persecuted for your faith > harassed because of what you believe

- One of the things we can be tempted to do when we experience trials and suffering is to back off or abandon our belief in God
 - Because it's very tempting to conclude that either
 - God is good but unable to stop my suffering > not all powerful
 - or
 - God is all powerful therefore is able stop my suffering, but doesn't > not good
 - So either way, God is not good or God is not all powerful
 - So why would you put your trust in him and follow him

- Might as well give up on God and go and do your own thing
- But when you think about it ... abandoning your belief in God because of trials and suffering doesn't help at all
 - If there's no God ... then you're left with no answer to the suffering you're enduring
 - It's just bad luck > life's not fair > seems so random
 - If you abandon your belief in God ... then in times of trial then all you're left with is despair and hopelessness
 - It's actually a bigger problem if you don't believe in God
- Getting rid of your belief in God won't help a thing
- Peter addressing ppl who have suffered a great deal and are about to suffer a lot more
 - And what Peter has to say in 1 Peter is very profound and wonderfully enlightening
 - What he does is he says ... as a Christian you can actually make sense of trials and suffering
 - And that there's no need to despair in times of suffering ... but as Christian you actually have hope
- That's what we're looking at today
 - A life of hope in the midst of suffering

2. Identity of the hopeful (v3-5)

- Peter begins identifying himself [SLIDE]
 - he's an apostle of Jesus Christ
- Gospels and book of Acts show
 - One of Jesus closest friends
 - Seen as the leader of 12 disciples
 - There from the beginning > saw and heard everything of Jesus ministry
 - Full of bravado > often declaring he would die with / for Jesus

- But denied knowing Jesus 3 times on the night Jesus was arrested
- Pentecost > filled with the HS > preached the first ever Christian sermon > God used him > 3000 people converted > best evangelistic event in the history of the world!
- Leader of the church in Jerusalem
- Seems many years later Peter ended up in Rome where he's writing this letter

[SLIDE]

- He identifies his readers as the Christians who are in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (see map) > modern day Turkey
- As well as identifying them by their location, Peter defines their identity in relation to God
 - This is much more significant **[SLIDE]**
- And look at how Peter defines the identity of his readers in v1-2 > they are
 - God's elect
 - Strangers in the world
 - Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God
- The amazing reality of being a Christian is that God chooses us and saves us
 - Our sinful human nature we're born with means we wouldn't by nature choose God
 - Our nature is to turn our backs on God
- But because God is gracious ... he chooses you and I to know him and be reconciled to him
- So these Christians in modern day Turkey and indeed all Christians, including you and I here today ... are God's elect
- While they're elect in relation to God ... in relation to the society around them they're 'strangers in the world'
 - Being one of God's elect puts Christians in opposition to the world

- They have
 - different worldviews
 - different moralities
 - different priorities
 - different goals in life

- The phrase 'strangers in the world' has sense of being exiles or refugees
 - They're people who aren't from this place
 - They belong to a different place
 - They're only passing through
 - They're temporary residents

- **Illustration - Living in London**
- When Liana and I first married we lived in London for 3 years
- But we were only temporary residents > we weren't citizens of UK > we only had temporary resident visas
- It meant we lived there ... but we always considered Australia was our home
- Our citizenship was elsewhere
- And we knew we wouldn't stay in London forever ... besides the Olympic Games were about to start in Sydney ... so we had to come home!

- Peter's point is that when you're a Christian and one of God's elect ... then this world is not your home
 - its only temporary
 - you're strangers in this world > you're merely passing through
- Your citizenship is in heaven, because heaven's your true home

- Important for Peter to remind his readers of their true identity

- Because as his readers are dealing with suffering and persecution and hardship for being Christian, Peter's going to remind them of who they are
- You're elect > you're one of God's chosen children
- This world is not your home, heaven is

- We'll see as we move through the rest of 1 Peter ... when they understand their true identity ... then they're able to deal with the trial and sufferings the world throws at them because they know
 - Its only temporary
 - They're God's elect

Application

- There are many ways that people 'define' their identity today
 - Professionally > I'm an engineer / student / teacher
 - Nationally > I'm Greek / Chinese / Inuit
 - Relationally > I'm a married woman with two kids / single white male
 - Genetically > I'm gay

- But there are a number of problems when we ground our identity in things of this world
 - If I define myself by what I DO ...
 - then what happens when I stop being an engineer or footballer
 - then I'm a retired engineer or ex-footballer
 - does that mean my identity no longer has meaning or value because I no longer do what I am
 - What if what I DO isn't as good as what other people do
 - If I'm 'just a cleaner' or 'just a shelf stacker' ... does that mean I'm less of a person

- When we define our identity with things of this world ... it'll drive us to behaviour and decisions and choices that will be accepted by others
 - We'll want to be and do things that the world values and applauds
 - If we get our identity wrong and start to define our identity by things of this world, then we'll start to living to fit in with the world

- Which is why as Christians we need to ground our identity in Christ
 - If you are in Christ, you're one of God's elect
 - And that means heaven's your home and you're exiles and strangers in this world
 - Until we realise that we're not a part of the world, we will continue to live by the standards of the world and seek the approval of the world

- **Illustration - Living like an Aussie in London**
- When Liana and I were living in London, we knew living there was only temporary and Australia was our true home
- And because we never considered London as our home and identified ourselves as Aussies ...
 - We lived differently to the English around us
 - Our identity dictated the lives we lived over there
 - Whenever England played Wallabies, I supported the Wallabies
 - Whenever the sun made a rare appearance in the summer I refrained from taking my shirt off and sunbathing in the park
 - Whenever anyone started to say how much they hated the French or Welsh or how much the loved Neighbours ... I could pretty much step out of the conversation

- As a Christian ... your identity is defined by your relationship with God
 - And that means not only will you live lives of obedience to Jesus that reflect your status

- But it also helps you and I to stand firm in the midst of trials and suffering
 - Because our citizenship is elsewhere and we're merely passing through as temporary residents looking forward to heaven

3. Future salvation of the hopeful (v3-5)

- That's what Peter moves onto in v3-5 [SLIDE]
- Here Peter goes on to say ... that while you may be strangers and exiles in this world ... because you're God's elect ... you actually have something better to look forward to
 - A living hope
 - An eternal inheritance
- The hope Christians have is a hope of
 - something better than the fallen-ness and brokenness of this world
 - something beyond the suffering and trials we endure
 - something that will last forever and not fade away or fall apart
- And it's not a fanciful hope
 - not something we're unsure will happen
 - not something we cross our fingers and wish will happen
- No ... it's a sure and certain hope
- How? Why?
 - because it's grounded in the resurrection of Jesus (v3)
 - if we want assurance of this hope ... then we can know it for certain because Jesus rose from the dead
- Not only do Christians have a living hope, they also have '*an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you*'
- A great image isn't it?
- Many people dream of getting an inheritance
 - Grandparents, uncle, parents ... leave you a sum of money or property

- But what happens to it?
 - You sell the house
 - You spend the money
 - And what are you left with
- But the heavenly inheritance promised to Gods elect is one that is 'untouched by death, unstained by evil, unimpaired by time'
 - It cannot be lost, stolen or taken away
 - It's guaranteed and kept in heaven for you awaiting your final salvation
- All this comes to the believer because they've been born again
- **Illustration – James Boags Beer Ad**
- James Boags beer ad
 - Beer is so good because it's made from the pure waters of Tasmania
 - Highlight the power of the water ... shows things coming into contact with the water and coming out completely renewed
 - Old ukulele > amazing steel string guitar [SLIDE x2]
 - Old push bike > brand new motorbike [SLIDE x2]
 - Canoe > speed boat [SLIDE x2]
 - Knife > Light saber [SLIDE x2]
- Anything immersed in the water is completely renewed
 - It's like it's been born anew
- [SLIDE OFF]
- And Peter says this is what happens to the believer ... because in Christ God has given us new birth > we're born again
- When God chooses you
 - Works in you by his HS to bring you to repentance and faith
 - Forgives you through the atoning death of Jesus on the cross
 - You're born again
 - You were dead in your sins but in Christ you're made alive
 - It's a spiritual re-birth
- Just like a baby is born and receives new life

- So the Christian person is born and receives new life
- Just like a baby is born into a new family
 - So the Christian is born a new into God's family

- And all this is because of God's great mercy
 - It is all by God's grace
 - It's not deserved, it's not earned,
 - It's purely because God chooses to show us mercy and grace and makes us born again

- **Application**
- Peter's chief aim in these verses is to cause us to praise God
 - for the mercy that He has shown us
 - and in particular for the new life that is ours in Christ
- Jesus has risen from the dead
 - And because of that we're born again
 - We're now a people of hope ... a people with a certain, eternal inheritance –
- Don't lose sight of this truth
- Never stop praising God for this in your life
 - Personal prayers
 - GG prayers
 - Songs we sing
 - Conversations we have
- Praise God and give thanks that all this is made possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

- Secondly, these verses beg the question ...
- What type of inheritance are you looking forward to?
 - Do you dream of one day receiving an inheritance from some long lost aunt so that you can

- Pay off the house
- Go on that dream holiday
- Splash out on a new car
- Or are you looking forward to the eternal inheritance that your father in heaven has in store for you that can never perish, spoil or fade
 - An inheritance that's eternal
 - An inheritance that of far greater value than any inheritance you might receive here on earth
- This is the inheritance we are to look forward to

[SLIDE]

4. Present experience of the hopeful (v6-9)

- Peter continues to spell out the realities of Christians who are God's elect
- In v6-9 he moves from outlining their future salvation to their present experience
- He says
 - the salvation that you have been born into
 - the living hope you've been blessed with
 - the eternal inheritance you've been guaranteed
- Are all cause for rejoicing ... EVEN THOUGH you are suffering and facing all kinds of trials and ordeals
- He goes on to explain why a Christian can rejoice even in the midst of trials and suffering
 - He says in v7 it's because God has ordained these things to refine your and strengthen your faith

[SLIDE]

- When gold is refined by fire a dross / scum is formed from all the impurities which are removed leaving a much purer form of gold
 - That's a good thing ... to have high quality gold rather than a lower grade gold mixed with impurities

- And Peter is saying ... this is the purpose of trials and suffering in the life of these Christians
 - It's to refine their faith
 - To make it stronger
 - To prove to them their faith is genuine
- And as these Christians suffer in their trials and yet continue to stand firm in their faith and look forward to that eternal inheritance
- They can know with confidence ...
 - They're faith is real
 - They're eternal inheritance is secure
 - And as a result they will praise and glorify God who has guarded and upheld them throughout it all

[SLIDE]

- The temptation for these Christians would have been to think ...
 - I'm suffering and going through hard times in life
 - Therefore God doesn't love me > I mustn't be a real Christian
 - God doesn't care about me
 - My faith mustn't be genuine
 - God isn't real because if he was he wouldn't allow me to go through all this
- Peter is saying ... NO
 - There's a reason that you are going through these difficult times
 - It's to refine & strengthen your faith like fire
- What Peter shows us ...
 - Just because you and I go through trials and suffering in life ... doesn't mean
 - God is unloving or unable to do anything about it
 - Actually he is loving and he is powerful to do something about it
 - But he allows suffering for our good ...
 - the refining & strengthening of our faith and

- ultimately his praise, honour and glory

- And because of this ... you and I can still rejoice in the midst of your trials and suffering
 - Because these trials and testing will help you to see your faith is real
 - And therefore have assurance that your eternal salvation is secure

- **Application**

- These verses and much of 1 Peter show us that being a Christian doesn't remove us from the pains and trials of life
 - This will be our experience while we await our eternal inheritance that God has kept in heaven for you

- I know many of you know this reality and don't need to be reminded that pain and suffering is our present experience

- I know many of you have gone through / are going through hard times
 - Uncertainty about finances and work
 - Sickness of family members
 - Death of loved ones
 - Troubling times with kids
 - Struggles with fitting in

- These are real and painful

- These verses remind us and are a comfort to us ...
 - That even in the midst of those trials and sufferings ...
 - There is a living hope and an eternal inheritance that in Christ, you've been born into
 - And that salvation is guaranteed for you through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
 - And that any suffering and trials you may go through today
 - Are not only refining your faith and proving it to be genuine

- But will only be temporary ... as you pass through on your way to your true home in heaven

[SLIDE]

- It's also good to be reminded of these things here in 1 Peter
 - Not only does it help us to make sense of and persevere through hard times we're experiencing now
 - Probably more importantly ... they prepare us for the hard times that will come in the future
- When hard times come ... and they will
 - That even in the midst of the emotion and stress and pain of the difficulty you're going through ... you will be armed and prepared to know how to deal with those circumstances
- God has not abandoned you because you're going through testing times
- There is nothing to be gained in abandoning your faith in God ... in fact you getting rid of your belief in God won't help a thing
- Your faith is not fake because you're suffering
- And so you can still rejoice ... not in your suffering ... but
 - That your salvation is secure
 - God is refining your faith and proving it to be real
 - The hope you have is a real and living hope
 - It's grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus
- And so as we put our faith in the Lord Jesus we can join with Peter in our praise of God
 - And we're filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,
 - Because in Christ you are receiving the goal of your faith,
 - the salvation of your souls

PRAY

Our Father in heaven, we praise you for your grace and mercy to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, that through his death and resurrection we've been born again into the living hope of eternal life. We praise you that through faith in Jesus we have a sure and certain inheritance in heaven that can never be lost. Help us to rejoice in our trials as they refine our faith and test our faith. Help us in times of testing to stand firm in your grace and the knowledge that our eternal future is secure. We ask this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus. AMEN