

The other day I saw a bumper sticker and all it said was "Got hope?" And in small letters it said Obama 08. Regardless of who you are voting for, this is one thing that politicians generally offer – I won't say that they succeed – but they generally offer hope. Hope that things will get better and that change is coming.

When we vote for a particular politician we hope that they will fulfill the promises they made when they were campaigning for whatever office they were running for. Usually, we are disappointed. But we have to remember that there is no salvation in politics. The old joke is usually true – how can you tell when a politician is lying – with the answer being that his lips are moving.

So, while we might have hope in a certain politician – it is something that is not a sure thing. It is more "I hope ... or I pray that he does what he says that he is going to do." But, as I said, it is not a sure thing. It is, by definition, a definite, absolute, maybe.

However, as Christians, we have a sure hope ... we have a hope that is based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is exactly what Peter has told us at the beginning of the letter that we have been studying for the last few months.

At the beginning of our study we read in 1 Peter 1:3-5: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*

This is a sure hope – an inheritance incorruptible that does not fade away ... it is a hope that we can take to the bank.

As Peter continue his exhortation to the Christians of the dispersion – he reminds them again of this hope. Remember who we are, as he describes us in 1 Peter 2:9-10: *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."*

As a result of who we are he then gives us a series of exhortations of how we should act and react in the various situations of life that we are presented with. You can look at the past sermons to see these exhortations.

But as he continues today, he again talks about suffering for being a Christian. Turn with me to Peter 3:13-17 (READ). Look closely at what Peter says beginning at verse 13.

Verse 13 tells us that EVEN if we suffer for being a Christian while we are following what God has revealed in His word, then no harm can come to us. Now, obviously, he is not talking exclusively about physical harm. Physical harm has come to Christians throughout the ages. Just read Foxes Book of Martyrs to see all those who died simply because of their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Yes, sometimes the Lord does deliver His people for His purpose. I think of my father-in-law, who I never had

the privilege to meet. He was convicted of murder in Communist China, but by the grace of God he was only deported and went on to have ministry that touched the lives of multitudes of people.

But, as I said, multitudes have died for simply because of their faith in Christ and are continuing to do so today. However, notice the words of Peter – *“And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?”*

I believe that what he is telling us that no spiritual or eternal harm can harm us if we follow the ways of the Lord. Yes, physical harm can come to us if we live our lives as Christians before an unbelieving world. It happened to Peter who, as tradition tells us, was crucified upside down. It happened to all of the Apostles, with the exception of John. It happened to 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians and it is still happening to 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians.

And so while those against us can harm us physically, they cannot take away our eternal inheritance ... the hope that we have. I believe that this is what Peter means in 1 Peter 3:14: *“But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”*

I am reminded of the words of our Savior in John 14:1-4 & 27: *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.” “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”*

The world cannot take away the inheritance that Christ has prepared for us. And in spite of suffering we can have the peace of God and we do not have to be afraid. But, not only are we not to be afraid, we are to then give a defense for the hope that is within us.

Look at what Peter says in the next verse, 1 Peter 3:15: *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”* We have a sure hope. We have something that no one can take away from us – and in spite of our circumstances, we are to be always ready to give a reason for this hope that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think back to all the blessings that Peter has told his readers and us. Remember, these were people that had to leave their homes because of persecution simply because of their faith in Christ. Peter is writing to encourage them and to remind them and us, of all that they have and that they should remain steadfast in their faith.

They had been chosen by God ... they had been saved from their sins by the blood of Jesus Christ ... they have a living hope with a place reserved in heaven for them ... a place that is perfect ... a place guarded by God Himself that cannot fade away or be taken away ... they have a faith that was based on what the prophets of long ago had revealed.

It is because of what they have ... and I need to point out that we have the same thing ... that they are to be always ready to give a defense for the hope that is within us. We know the end of the story ... we have this sure hope in Christ ... and we need to tell others about it.

We need to tell others that Jesus Christ came ... that he lived, died and rose from the dead for the sins of those

who believe in him as Savior and Lord. My friends, the gospel is not complicated. It is these simple truths. The Apostle Paul summarized the gospel very simple in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4: *“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...”*

As I have said in the past, it is doubtful that we will have to suffer physically for confessing Christ as Savior. Yes, there might be ridicule and mocking for the things that we believe, but it is doubtful that we will be put to death for our faith in Christ.

But as Peter tells us in the concluding verses, that if it is the will of God, as we live our lives before God and the world, that we might suffer. Peter says this: 1 Peter 3:16,17: *“having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”*

So, as we consider all that is happening around us – the economy, the unrest in the world, problems in our families – whatever the situation might be, remember that as Christians, we are in a very real sense, above the fray. We can have hope and joy regardless of their circumstances because of our relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.