

A LIVING HOPE

“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,” (1 Pet 1:3)

There is, as you know, a dramatic difference between Simon Peter and Judas Iscariot. Peter is remembered as the Rock Apostle whose name leads the list of the Twelve. Judas Iscariot, is remembered as the traitor, and is always mentioned last. We believe that Peter is now being comforted by the angels, and that it had been good for Judas if he had never been born.

One difference between these two men is hope. Peter was born again into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus, and Judas killed himself three days too soon.

It needs to be remembered that both of these men were warned by Jesus, and both denied Him. Both were seized with remorse. Both were sinners in need of salvation. Both faced the demon of discouragement. Both had an opportunity to repent. Peter did repent, but Judas killed himself. What was the difference? Obviously Peter had hope and Judas did not! Paul makes reference to those who are alienated from Christ, without hope, and without God (Eph. 2:12). No wonder suicide is rampant among such people. Hopelessness is a killer! It destroys individuals, families, and nations. It blinds the eyes and deafens the ears to a brighter tomorrow.

Both Peter and Judas witnessed the transforming power of Jesus. Nobody was too sick or too sinful as to be hopeless. Even if you have been married five times or dead four days, there was still hope. Even if you have been sick 12 years, or paralyzed for 38 years, there was still hope. Even if you were blind from birth, a leper, or a lunatic, there was still hope. Even if you were controlled by legions of demons, there was still hope.

Then came the cross! The disciples forsook Him and fled, and Peter followed from a distance. Then, as you know, Peter denied Christ three times. When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he lost all hope. He was seized with remorse, gave back the money, and went out and hanged himself. Peter was also discouraged, but not yet suicidal. Filled with doubt and discouragement he somehow managed to climb the stairs to a large upper room where other discouraged disciples huddled together for fear of the Jews. Like sails without wind they were dead in the water. Bewildered and confused they did not know what to do or where to go.

Then two women named Mary brought news that the tomb was empty. They were specifically commanded to tell the “disciples and Peter” (Mk. 16:7). The disciples, however, refused to believe and considered their words as “nonsense” (Lk. 24:11). Then we are told that Peter ran to the tomb, saw the grave clothes, and “wondered to himself what had happened” (Lk. 24:12). Next we are told that Jesus “appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve” (1 Cor. 15:5) That’s when Peter was born again by a living hope. That’s when Peter received a totally new and different perspective on life. Not long before his dreams had been scattered like chaff on the summer threshing floor. Now, the living hope and the resurrection transformed everything. The preponderance of the evidence, like labor pains, stirred up within him the promises of Jesus that he had been so reluctant to believe. The resurrection of Jesus changed everything in the life of Peter, but Judas died three days too soon.

Now let us examine ourselves. Are we like Judas, or Peter? Do we have a dead faith or a living hope? Are we going to cash in our chips and quit, or will we turn to the resurrected Christ for encouragement and help? Will we spend eternity with rewards or regrets?

Paul made reference to the “power of the resurrection” (Eph. 1:17 - 23; 3:14 - 21; Phil. 3:10 etc.) He said that the power of Jesus was able to “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” Christians are different. We are born again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus. Eight centuries before it happened, Isaiah said it like this: **“but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isa 40:31)**

May you also be born again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ!