Hi,

Happy Friday. Today’s updates:

* This Sunday in my 11am class we will be continuing the series, *Living Hope*. We’ll be talking about practicing resurrection, in light of the hope that is ours. I hope you will join us [on my Facebook page for ministry](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* Monday is Labor Day, so my Monday class on Matthew will not meet. Also, there will be no Hope in Christ email on Monday.
* My noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet next week on [my Facebook ministry page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* The Weekly Bible Study for this weekend is attached.

For the next week, we are going to talk about hope in tough times, using 1 Peter as the lens through which we strive to grasp our true hope.

***Revelation 6:1-8 (NRSV)***

**Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, “Come!” I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.**

**When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, “Come!” And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.**

**When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, “Come!” I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a day’s pay, and three quarts of barley for a day’s pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!”**

**When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, “Come!” I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.**

***1 Peter 1:1-12 (NRSV)***

**Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,**

**To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 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.**

**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, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, 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 honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 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, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**

**Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, 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. 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!**

Well, that’s odd isn’t it. Here we have a series about restoring hope in tough times and the first Scripture passage is John’s terrifying vision of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. You might think that I’m using it just to help us realize that as bad as things are for so many people, it could be far worse for us all.

But that isn’t my point. Rather, the vision gets to the heart of John’s purpose in writing Revelation. It is a circulating letter written to believers who are being variously persecuted and ostracized in Asia Minor. John intends the letter to be both encouraging and comforting. The four horsemen are meant as a boldly stark reminder that the Christians have done right in placing their hope and trust in God. Though many people may place their trust in their armies (the first horseman), their police (the second), and their economies (the third), none of these can provide genuine and everlasting peace and security. There are no doctors or healthcare systems that can give us eternal life (the fourth horsemen, death). There is only one who is worthy of our complete and unyielding trust: the Lord God. One or more horsemen may be riding across the landscape, but the believers are to be comforted in their knowledge that the anchor holds. God has not abandoned them even though it may seem that way at times. And it is to God, to Jesus Christ, that Peter points some first-century Christians who are also living through very tough times.

*Introducing 1 Peter*

1 Peter is another circulating letter, this one written by the apostle Peter. He writes from Rome (Peter refers to Rome as “Babylon” in 5:13) in the early 60’s AD, to encourage the Christians in central Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) who “have had to suffer various trials” (1:6) and are living as “aliens and exiles” (2:11).

These Christians are not exiles in a literal sense; rather, as Achtemeier et al write, they are “people whose commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ have led to transformed attitudes and behaviors that place them on the margins of respectable society. They have become victims of social ostracism, their allegiance to Christ having won for them slander, animosity, reproach, scorn, vilification, and contempt.”

As difficult as such ostracism might be in our world, it was much more powerful in the NT world, a social world driven by status and community. This ostracism created very serious economic problems for the believers, especially for those in urban setting. Former customers and employers might well want nothing to do with someone who would pledge allegiance to a man named Jesus and not to Caesar. In the face of these trials, Peter urges Christians to “rejoice insofar as you are sharing in Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed”(4:13).

How are these Christians to respond to their persecutors? “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called – that you might inherit a blessing.” (3:9). Peter goes so far as to instruct these believers to “Honor the Emperor” (2:17).

Despite increasing hostility toward Christianity in some portions of our culture, we are not suffering because we are being persecuted for our beliefs. Nonetheless, many of us are going through very tough times with this pandemic and the economic losses; all of us are surely uncertain and apprehensive about the future. The question for those believers in Asia Minor and for us is where we will turn to find a renewed hope. What, or better, *who* will be our anchor in the midst of turbulence and fear?

*A living hope*

In the salutation of his letter, Peter reminds the Christians that they, despite all their difficulties, have been “chosen and destined by God the Father.” They have been sanctified (set aside for God and strengthened for holiness) by the Spirit for the purpose of being obedient to Jesus, an obedience which is possible because they have been “sprinkled with his blood.”

Then, Paul begins his pastoral letter by lifting up for these believers and for us all, the living hope that is Jesus Christ. We have been born anew into “a living hope” and the ground of our hope is the truth of the resurrection. It is the proof that justifies our hope, our confidence that our trust in God is well-placed. As the children of God, we have an inheritance that can never diminish nor be taken away. God protects our inheritance, our salvation, for us, locking it away in the vaults of heaven.

Peter wants us to rejoice in this knowledge, even though we are going through tough times. A young woman in one of my classes told me of a saying that she learned a former pastor: “Christian belief is knowing that the worst thing is not the last thing.” This has quickly become one of my favorite one-sentence summaries of the Good News. Peter, you see, reminds the believers that even though they may be suffering in the present, God is protecting for them a glorious future when God’s “Last Thing” will be revealed to them for their everlasting joy.

Indeed, Peter writes, tough times test us, they test our faith. Such times can be a trial by fire, revealing the genuineness of our faith, just as fire proves the genuineness of gold. We may not have seen Jesus, but we love him. We have faith and we rejoice in it, for our very salvation is its end result.

Finally, Peter tells the believers that though their lives are filled with troubles and difficulties, they are experiencing the climax of God’s work that all the prophets of Israel had long promised. They, and we, are the rescued in God’s great rescue plan that began with a promise to Abraham long before (Genesis 12:3). Indeed, the “exiles” have been given Good News at which even “the angels long to look!”

In a letter written to Christians who are suffering, Peter begins by reminding them who they are and whose they are. He helps them to focus on God’s assurance that the worst thing is not the last thing, that their salvation awaits them, a future far more precious than they can imagine. We’ll see tomorrow that Peter then begins to help the believers understand what their part is in restoring hope in tough times.

*A bit more: persecution of the Christian Church*

Contrary to what many Christians believe, there was no empire-wide persecution of Christians until about 250AD. Instead, in the first centuries of the church’s life, persecutions were localized and varied in intensity from to time and place to place. Even the horrific persecutions of Nero in the mid-60’s were limited to Rome.

Still, most Christians, at one time or another, were persecuted and ostracized (1) for their unwillingness to worship Caesar, and/or (2) their “anti-family” philosophy, and/or (3) their strange religious practices. Roman governors were focused on keeping the peace and because the Christians tended to stir things up, though it was not always of their own doing, they were often at odds with the authorities. Rumors and legends about the Christians’ weird practices, made them easy and tempting targets. For example, stories were told of the Christians’ cannibalistic practices, such as gathering to eat the body and blood of a man, a god(?), named Jesus. Think about it!

‘til Tuesday, grace and peace,

Scott