

Resurrection as a Way of Life: Part Two

Speaker: Tim Mackie

[EMSB theme fades in]

Hey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, "Exploring My Strange Bible." I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last twenty years' worth of lectures and sermons, where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible, and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you, too. I also helped start this thing called BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at bibleproject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[EMSB theme fades out]

All right, this is episode two of a five-part series. This represents a number of teachings I did as a teaching pastor at Door of Hope, on the ideas of "resurrection" and "new creation" in the New Testament. And here, in this teaching, we're going to focus on the first paragraph of the first letter of Peter, in the New Testament. And he uses this beautiful set of metaphors of "new birth" and "living hope" that followers of Jesus have because of his resurrection from the dead.

And in it, I share the story of a remarkable human being—a Holocaust survivor, named Viktor Frankl—and what he learned about human psychology, and the important nature of human hope in our stories, and how that connects to what Peter's saying. This has always been one of my favorite paragraphs—in the first letter of Peter—and it's a real privilege to get to share it with you all. So there you go. Let's dive in and see what Peter has to say about a living hope. Let's go for it.

[Musical break (2:05–2:10)]

There is so much wisdom and power here. It's actually—depending on the translation you're reading—it's actually, in the letter that Peter wrote this in—it's written in Greek—it's one, entire, long, run-on sentence. Most of our English translations can't bear that, and your English grammar teacher certainly couldn't. And so most of our English translations end up putting it in different sentences—but this is a power sentence, is what it is. And so we'll begin our exploration today, and then that will continue, in even more depth, over the next two weeks at Church in the Park.

But what we're doing this summer is: we are taking time to focus and explore the meaning of Jesus's resurrection. We're doing a survey—it's like a tour, a virtual tour—of the whole New Testament—all of the different authors and writers, the apostles of the New Testament—and we're exploring how all of them unpack the significance of the resurrection of Jesus—of the empty tomb and of the risen Jesus.

It's one of these events, as we've been saying, it's one of—the resurrection of Jesus—it's become such a “fixture” in the Christian tradition, for really good reason. It's hard for us to think that there was a time before Jesus's death, where such an idea was, just, not even anywhere on the radar of the followers of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus came as such a surprise, and something that none of the followers of Jesus saw coming in the way that it happened. It shattered everything that they thought they believed. It shattered all their ideas about who God was in the person of Jesus, and where the world's going, and who they are, and who Jesus is. It's truly the foundation of everything in the Christian faith.

And so today we're looking at just one—one of the most important voices from the early Jesus movement: Peter. And what we get here is his reflections on the importance of the resurrection of Jesus for you and I, as disciples of Jesus. Think about who Peter is, right? The Bible didn't drop out of heaven this morning, right? There's a long story attached, and all of the people who wrote these books have fascinating stories attached to them.

So you have a figure like Peter, you know—he's one of the first followers of Jesus. You know—he was one of these guys who was, like, fishing. [Tim laughs] He was fishing when he ran into Jesus for the first time. He's one of his first disciples. He was one of

two of the disciples who utterly betrayed Jesus on the night that he was arrested. You know the name of the other betrayer . . . *Judas*. But Peter, too, pulled his own stunt of betrayal, pretending he didn't even know Jesus, in that scene of betrayal—three times.

Peter was one of the people who discovered, along with the women-disciples and John, the empty tomb of Jesus. He was one of the first people to see the empty tomb and be like, “What? What’s happening here?” Peter was among the first of what would become hundreds of early disciples of Jesus who met Jesus, risen from the dead—he was one of the first. And so he was commissioned by Jesus to become a leader in the early church.

And so here, he’s writing this letter we call “First Peter,” and he’s writing it to a whole group of churches living in what we call Turkey—modern Turkey, up near the Black Sea. And he’s writing to a group of churches that he knows—presumably he went there or helped start them.

And what he knows about these church communities is that they’re suffering. They’re undergoing persecution, like—it’s what’s happening to Christians right now, today, in many parts of the world. The early Christians were viewed with suspicion—you know, they didn’t acknowledge the Romans’ Caesar as divine. They didn’t pledge their allegiance to the gods of Rome, the way everybody else did, which meant they didn’t participate in much of Roman cultural life.

The early Christians were called “atheists”—did you know that? There’s this famous story—it’s from about fifty years after Jesus—there’s this Christian, whose name is Polycarp—he’s on trial for giving his life and allegiance to Jesus, instead of Caesar. And he’s called an “atheist.” [Tim laughs] It was kind of funny—anyway, I mean—you get the irony living in modern Western culture.

And why is he called an atheist? It’s because he doesn’t acknowledge the power, or reality, of all of these “gods” that these Greek and Roman neighbors offer sacrifices to—he gives his allegiance to Jesus and Jesus alone. And that didn’t make sense to anybody in these early decades.

And so the early Christians are undergoing one of the first waves of persecution. We don’t know exactly what the details were happening. We know that it involved people being taken to prison. We know that it involved physical harassment. We know that it involved some people getting killed because they follow Jesus, and because they don’t fit into the status quo.

And so Peter knows about this, and so he writes this letter to a whole group of churches that are undergoing intense suffering and intense hardship. What’s amazing is that this is Peter—like two-ish decades—after the empty tomb and meeting the risen Jesus—we’re two decades into the Jesus movement.

And when Peter wants to give hope—he's acting as a pastor here—when he wants to give hope to followers of Jesus who are being made fun of by their neighbors—who are being beat up in dark alleys by their coworkers—and when friends and loved ones are disappearing into prisons, to be executed—what does he have to say to them? All because they follow Jesus—like, what does he have to say? And what is the first thing that he brings up? Did you see it when we heard the reading from the paragraph—what's the first thing he mentions? The resurrection of Jesus.

So apparently, after two decades of prayer and reflection for Peter: when I encounter pain and oppression and injustice and suffering in my world and in my own life experience, where's the first place Peter tells me to focus and to fix my hope? The empty tomb and Easter morning. He says, "It's all right there." And he's given to us one of the most beautiful ways of describing what the resurrection means to suffering, hurting people. And it's right in this first sentence, here.

"In God's grace and mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." [Tim laughs] I should just stop talking right now. Like, what more could be said that's more beautiful and profound than that? The resurrection of Jesus—something happened, in Peter's view—something happened that was so profound. [Tim grins] It's not just like, "Oh, dead people do come back to life. What a strange world we live in, you know?" That's not the conclusion that Peter draws.

The conclusion that Peter draws is that, "Oh my gosh, the empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus"—that means something about the future of the universe, for Peter. It means something about the future of all humanity, which means: it means something about our own future as disciples of Jesus, and especially disciples of Jesus when they encounter suffering and tragedy.

And that reality that got revealed and opened up—that exploded out of the empty tomb on Easter morning—it creates what he calls "hope," and—a "living hope." So it's not just this belief in something that happened back then. It's a belief in a reality that's alive—it's dynamic, and it does—it's at work in the world today.

And it's actually so powerful that you could only describe its effects on people. When you allow what happened on Easter morning to become your own hope—that's alive and dynamic, and that's messing with your own view of the world and your whole life and all your habits and behaviors—then the only appropriate phrase to describe its effect on a human—the hope of the resurrection—is that you have been "born another time."

Peter definitely didn't come up with that metaphor on his own. [Tim grins] I think I remember Jesus saying something about that—he's the one responsible for this image. Do you remember where? In John 3, Jesus is talking with a rabbi—a very accomplished

Jewish rabbi—who comes to Jesus and butters him up, “Clearly you’re a teacher sent from God.” And what is Jesus’s response to one of the most wise, religious men in all of Jerusalem? [Tim laughs] “Yeah, you need a new life—you need to get a life. That’s what you need.”

Something happens because of the hope of the resurrection—the potential of this hope to change and transform a human being—the only appropriate language to describe its power is that it can make you into a “new human”—a new and different kind of human. And it’s the first thing that Peter brings up. It’s so powerful.

And so, before we go any further, to think about, look, at what Peter’s unpacking here, I just want us to just stop. You know, these images can become so overly familiar to us that they lose the power that they had. For Peter, the empty tomb on Easter morning means a dynamic, life-transforming, world-altering hope. That’s what happened—when Jesus came out of the tomb. And it has the capacity to utterly transform a human being.

Why? Why does Peter think that? Well, what Peter clearly assumes, or knows—he knows something about how humans work. Almost certainly, it’s what he learned from Jesus—about how humans work. Human beings are unique creatures. We’re not, obviously, totally divorced from, you know, the world of living creatures that we’re a part of—like, we are creatures—we come from the dust—we return to it.

But there is something unique about the human species—lots of unique things—and one of those unique things is that we just have this insatiable need for hope. Hope is one of these things that, for human beings, when we don’t have it, life becomes unbearable.

Consider the mountain lion. [Tim laughs] And why would I consider the mountain lion? I’ve had the opportunity to be out in the middle of nowhere, already, a couple of times this summer. One of those places is a place known for mountain lions. It was—I was staying near a lake called “Cougar Lake.” [Tim laughs] And my son and I discovered a disemboweled deer—fresh—just a couple hours old—not two hundred yards from where we were sleeping. [Tim laughs] Terrified the whole rest of the trip—so utterly terrified.

So—but consider the mountain lion. You know, the mountain lion doesn’t sit in its den, like, wondering [Tim grins] what’s going to happen to it after it dies, you know? Or if anybody likes it, you know? The mountain lion doesn’t sit there wondering what the purpose of its life is, right? Or what next year’s going to bring. The mountain lion wakes up as a creature of instinct and impulse, and it hunts a deer to eat and survives another day. It’s an animal—and we don’t fault the mountain lion for being that.

But we do fault human beings for acting like that, don’t we? Right—we expect human beings to do something more. And unfortunately, something like the last twenty-one

days shows us that it's actually quite difficult for us to become something more than just the mountain lion—but there you have it. We know that to be truly human is to be more than the mountain lion.

And there's something about human beings—we have the psychological need to organize our life events into a storyline that has a goal—to understand that the meaning of the events in my life, there's some kind of purpose—that it's all fitting into a story. I mean, I'm not saying anything that every psychiatrist and psychologist on the planet wouldn't tell you, right? Human beings need hope to survive.

One of the most profound teachers, to me, of this—not a follower of Jesus—but a brilliant, brilliant psychologist whose story you absolutely need to know. Have you guys heard—have you heard, or read, of Viktor Frankl? I realized it's been—I'd actually checked on my calendar—it's been three years since I brought up Viktor Frankl at the Sunday gathering. And so that needs to—I should bring him up at least once a year.

This is a very, very important human being from the last one hundred years: Viktor Frankl—here you go. [Tim gestures to visual] That's the young Viktor Frankl. He passed away in 1997. He was a Jewish psychiatrist [and] psychologist. He lived in Austria. He was born in the 1920s, and he was in his early twenties when the Nazis conquered Austria.

And so he and his wife—young wife—along with all of the Jews who were living in the city in Austria where he lived—he was deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto for a year. And then after that, he and his wife, and everybody he knew, was transported to the concentration camp in Dachau. Viktor Frankl's—he's a Holocaust survivor. And he—so remarkable—out of all of his friends and family, only he and one of his sisters survived Dachau. He lost everyone that he knew and loved.

And in the first half of this remarkable little book—you must go to Powell's after the Sunday gathering and buy a paperback of *Man's Search for Meaning*—it's short—you can read it in two afternoons—it will change your life forever. And the first half of it, he just tells his story of what that was like—what the two and a half years of captivity, and the horror of being in captivity to the Nazis, was like.

And part of how he survived—how he tells his story—was *hope*. He was such a true academic that the only way he could cope with the horror of the death and suffering that he saw around him was to analyze it and become a psychologist. And so, he had to do manual labor, like everybody did, but he actually began seeing people for therapy sessions in the camps, in the evenings. It was his way of, just, coping and helping make sense.

And he became—he was such a nerd, such an academic—he became obsessed with how people were processing the horror. And why is it that some people seem to survive

and do well, and why is it that some people seem to be crushed? And one of the things that he talks about in the book is precisely what Peter is talking about: hope. *Hope*.

What he saw was that there were some people who processed their suffering—here's what he says—it's this really amazing section. He talks about how life in a concentration camp—it was uniquely horrifying, because what the Nazis were doing—it was humans doing to other humans, in the scale and the scope—it was absolutely horrifying and unique.

But the kind of trauma, and the kind of loss, that people in these camps experienced is the same kind of loss, Frankl says—is what happens to all people, just, usually over a longer span of time. So you lose your roots, and your sense of home. You lose people you love. You lose friends. You lose your trajectory in life—your career, your accomplishments, your standing in your circle of friends, in society. You lose all of your wealth and all of your possessions. You lose your freedom of movement. You lose your strength. And then you die.

That is actually going to happen to all of us—all of us. And what made this experience unique was that: what for many, if not most humans, gets drawn out over the course of a decade or two decades, for them was concentrated into a period of, like, a year—and, just, the weight of that trauma.

And so what he came to the conclusion was: that the only people who were able to survive in some kind of “semi-healthy” way were people who had hope. He said some people responded to this “condensed loss and suffering”—they became like mountain lions. They just—they became brutal, and so bitter and angry, that they just became like animals—creatures of instinct and survival—in the camps.

He observed and worked with other people who became, just, utterly indifferent and apathetic. They just became—they just shut out everything in the world—felt nothing. He tells the story of a man who was convinced that the war would be over in three months, and he had set a date on the calendar. And when the date came and then passed, and the war was definitely not over—he documented it—he got a fever, and he was dead within a week.

He talks about lots of people who dealt with the suffering and the loss through what psychologists call “displacement,” or “fantasy.” And essentially what he saw people doing was, they would paint pictures of how they were going to recover their former life. They were certain that they would reconnect with their loved ones and their family, and they would rebuild their wealth and their way of life, and they would move back to their home. And for many people, that's what kept them alive.

But he also noticed, with the people that he followed up, if they did in fact survive, was that most of these people fell into total ruin and depression because, of course, nobody's life was ever the same after that, even if you lived through it.

And so there was a small number, himself included, of people who he could say survived in some kind of "semi-healthy" way. And these were people who had hope, but their hope was something—he calls it—"simple." It was a hope that could transcend any circumstance. So there's a baker who got such joy from baking bread. He just fixed his hope on the hope of being able to work in a bakery and bake bread once more—nobody could take that from him, and that was his hope, and it kept him alive.

He talks about a couple musicians who, their only hope was to be free, to have an instrument, and to play music once again. And for himself, it was to be able to practice and do therapy again, and help people. And that was the common denominator: *hope*. But not just any kind of hope. It was a hope that, in some way, couldn't be taken away from them by another person.

And it seems to me, this is the whole—and then he goes on to develop what it means to live like that throughout your entire life. It's an incredible book. Have I convinced you to buy it yet? [Tim laughs] You really need to go buy it.

But so, here's Viktor Frankl, and what he's telling us is what Peter's telling us—it's what he assumes, and it's what all psychologists know. It's that human beings, we're not like mountain lions. Like consciousness—the blessing or curse of human consciousness—is that we need to organize our lives into a story that has a goal, that has a purpose, and that has a hope. And when humans do not have that, we wither. We become animals—we become zombies—or we become fantasizers, who can't deal with the realities of life that face us.

And that's exactly what Peter is describing here: a real hope. A real hope that cannot be touched by circumstances. And so what Frankl's story forces you to ask, and what Peter's forcing us to ask, is, like: "Oh yeah, what *is* that for me? Like, what is my hope really?"

And he highlights two things about it that I just—I want us to look at, and it'll allow us to turn the magnifying glass back on ourselves. And as we come to worship and take the bread and the cup here today, to take a look, a hard look, at our lives and what we really are hoping in.

Because when—what for him was condensed—right?—this form of suffering and loss over the course of just a couple of years—it's the same story that's going to happen to all of us: loss, tragedy, suffering, death—how do we deal with that? And in Peter's mind, what it means to be a follower of Jesus means to go through that experience—followers of Jesus are not immune from any of that—it's to go through all of that with a "living

hope,” that so transforms my outlook on all of those events that I’m actually a new and different kind of human, with how I make sense of all of this. How and why does the hope of the empty tomb of Jesus do that for me?

Look at the first thing that he says about it. He says that we’ve been given “new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.” And then he goes on to talk about that hope. He turns it into a metaphor—a banking, financial metaphor—of “an inheritance”—do you see that? It’s in verse 5. “We’ve been given birth into a living hope and”—verse 4—“into an inheritance.”

And what about this inheritance? “It can’t perish. It can’t spoil. It can’t fade. It’s kept in Heaven for you, who through faith are being shielded by God’s power until the coming of salvation”—which is the return of King Jesus, to bring justice and healing to our world.

So you have something in the bank—did you know that? Apparently you have something in the bank. And it doesn’t change—it doesn’t change. And when he says it’s “kept in Heaven,” his point is not: “that’s where you’re going to go to get it.” It’s actually the opposite. The point is that it’s kept in Heaven and it’s secure and it’s going to come here when Jesus returns—when the salvation is revealed.

So there’s something that the empty tomb and Easter morning mean for me as a disciple of Jesus. It’s like this deposit—this huge store of cash, right? An inheritance of wealth—a whole future—and it’s actually untouchable. It cannot be touched—it remains unchanged. That’s what Easter unlocks. Now, why and how? We’ll talk about that in just a minute, but that’s his first point.

And it’s precisely what Frankl is saying human beings’ need to survive the horrors of living life in our world. It’s a hope that transcends any and all life circumstances. It’s certain. And you don’t have to live very long—I don’t care where you live on planet Earth—to know that there is virtually nothing in life that you can say is that certain. But Peter says that’s precisely what the resurrection of Jesus means: that there is at least one thing that’s *certain*. There’s this inheritance, this future hope, and it cannot be touched by *any* horrible thing that happens to you. It remains unchanged.

However, you and I do not remain unchanged. Our hope remains untouchable and unchanged, but you and I don’t remain unchanged, do we? And he talks about—he sums up a day on planet Earth with this other metaphor that he uses. “A day on planet Earth” means “hardship and suffering.” And what that suffering does is—he calls it by this metaphor of “going into the fire”—did you see this in the reading?

He says, “You’re going through grief—you’re suffering, suffering grief. There’s these trials and hardships.” And he says, “These have come, and they’re proving—they’re testing the genuineness of your hope and your faith. Here’s what it’s like,” he says—“it’s

like gold perishing as it's refined"—by what? What does he say? "Fire. So your hope remains fixed and unchanged. But you don't remain unchanged. In fact, a day or a lifetime on planet Earth is like being consumed and burned out by the fire." That's his image, for suffering and grief and trials.

And some of you can resonate. You might sum up a whole season of your life by feeling like you went through the furnace. You got burned and hurt, and you lost—things were burned away. What's going on with this image? It's very powerful, actually. Because at the same time, he says, "You're not staying the same—you're suffering grief—it's like you're being consumed by the fire." But then he says, "If you're a disciple of Jesus with this fixed hope, what can be your attitude and your posture as you go through all of that suffering and grief?" What does he say?

At the beginning of verse 6—in all of this suffering and grief, what's a disciple of Jesus doing? "Rejoicing," he says. And, as he says, down in verse 8, "you're filled with inexpressible and glorious joy." So Peter's inviting us to see that this fixed hope is so powerful, it transforms the way a disciple of Jesus undergoes suffering and grief and pain—with this attitude of what he calls "joy."

Now, right off the bat, I think in our modern, therapeutic culture, we immediately think, "Oh, this is the sign of someone who's very unhealthy." [Tim laughs] Right? To, like, have joy in the midst of suffering—are you with me? That's what our—I don't know if your mind goes there—my mind goes there. I was like, "Oh, somebody who's able to be happy amidst great suffering and trial, this is surely a sign of someone who's in denial—right? And who's not allowing themselves to process their emotions and their grief, and they're actually emotionally unhealthy."

So that's not what Peter's talking about here. This isn't "turn that frown upside down," kind of thing, [Tim laughs] right? So is Peter any stranger to grief and to pain? Of course he's not—of course he's not. Is Jesus—whatever Jesus is calling us to, through Peter here—it's nothing that Jesus himself didn't undergo.

Did Jesus allow himself to feel the emotional pain of grief and loss? Did he? So think of the story of what Jesus is undergoing in the Garden of Gethsemane, right? As he's facing his fate of betrayal and abandonment and death, and everything that's going to happen to him in the next twenty-four hours—as he kneels and prays in the garden.

And what all of the Gospel authors tell us, what he's doing there: he's weeping. He's grieving. He doesn't even have his own words. He starts quoting from these grief poems, from the book of Psalms, in the Hebrew Scriptures—talking about how his heart's broken—he's "overwhelmed with grief and sorrow to the point of death."

So whatever it means to have "joy," despite—in suffering as a Christian, it doesn't mean "unhealthy denial." It's not what this is about. This is about a posture of hope. This is

why “hope” and “joy” are simultaneously overlapping here, in this passage. It’s a decision, based off of hope in the future—that these present circumstances of suffering don’t get to define the meaning of my life. This present suffering and these trials, they don’t get to rob me of my joy because they cannot rob me of my hope. My hope’s untouchable—but I’m not untouchable.

And so it’s this paradox—I just call it the “paradox of suffering.” It’s all over the New Testament, and it’s happening right here. What is it about the empty tomb, and what is it about suffering that can produce hope? And it’s—you know, I didn’t—I was such a focused—growing up: skateboarding, hearing—and graffiti—here’s what I know about the world as an eighteen-year-old: skateboarding and graffiti and Twinkies, right? So, anything I’ve learned about anything outside of that has been through books or movies, you know?

And so it’s this whole elaborate metaphor here of “metalsmith.” I know there are metalsmiths in Portland—there’s one off 20th and Hawthorne, actually a whole shop back there. Anyway, I don’t know anything about metalsmithing, right? So these metaphors don’t resonate with me on a deep level, but when you get them—which they’re not hard to get—they’re very powerful.

Peter talks about the paradox of “joy” and “pain and suffering,” and how those crash into each other, and it all comes together in this metaphor of metal—melting down metal. Did you see it? He says, “Your faith and your hope and your joy are this thing that get melted down as they go through the fire”—do you see it?

And he says, “they go through the fire”—this is in verse 7—“they’re of greater worth than gold, which perishes, even though refined by fire.” So, you know, I’ve seen as many movies as you have about medieval Europe, or whatever—and so, that’s about what I know about how to make a sword, or a shield [Tim laughs] or something like that.

But, you know—so let’s, you know—you dig up iron or steel or silver, or whatever, out of the earth. And so it comes out—it’s like this big, silver nugget, or something like that—[Tim laughs] I don’t know—I’ve never held one or touched one before. But you see pictures of them. And it’s a big, whatever, core piece of that metal, or that element. But if it comes out of the ground, what’s also woven and riddled, all the way through that thing? It’s like rock and dirt.

And so this process of refining—what is it? So you take this core element, right—of silver, or in this case, gold—and you put it under intense heat and pressure. And what happens? It melts—it melts—it becomes liquid. And then—I actually don’t know the technical process for how . . . you don’t get, like, a kitchen strainer and run it through the liquid or something. But there is a process by which all of the rock and the dirt—right?—that’s floating around now, in that liquid metal—it gets removed. What’s the technical

term for that stuff? It's called "dross," right? Sediment—it's dirt and rock, and it's called "dross."

And then all that stuff gets strained out of it. The metal is now allowed to cool and harden—[Tim laughs] somebody else should be up here giving this lecture right now—somebody who knows what they're talking about. But the basic—are you with me, here? Are you guys with me? You've seen this happen in the movies. Something—some important sword gets melted down. . . . Anyway, so that's what Peter's talking about.

So, like, think about this image here. What Peter's saying is: your hope, it's fixed—it never changes, because it's based not on you; it's based on what happened to Jesus when he came out of the tomb. But you and I don't remain unchanged. When we fix that as our hope, what happens to you is that my suffering and my grief become this paradox where: it's very painful—it's painful to get burned by the fire—but at the same time, it's a strange gift for a disciple of Jesus. "Suffering" and "grief" are this unwelcome, "strange gift," if I can see it through a new set of eyes.

Because what it's doing is—the image right here—it's melting me down. And it's removing from me all of these things that are not the essence of who I am. It's removing false hopes, false identities. Suffering has a way of focusing me on what's truly important.

Spend an afternoon, or spend a day, with one of your grandparents or great-grandparents and—because, by the time you reach that age, you've seen a thing or two. And for many people, that produces immense wisdom, to have seen so much hardship and suffering. Suffering is a strange teacher—a painful teacher. But it does something really profound to human beings if we allow it to do so, and not to crush us.

And so he uses this image of refining, purifying—suffering *purifies* me. Why does it do that? Well, think back to what Frankl said. For Frankl, what life in the camps did is: it stripped away everything that gave people's lives meaning—it's what suffering does. It condensed the loss of status and wealth and friends and family and freedom of movement—it just took all of that away. And what that forces a person to do is to ask the question, like: what am I really about? Who am I? And what am I hoping for? What's the meaning of my life?

And for many of us, we have so attached our value and our identity to precisely those things that you lose through suffering—we can't go on without it. And so there's something, as a disciple of Jesus, where suffering the loss—all of these things get stripped away. And that becomes a strange gift, because it forces me to either be crushed by my suffering, or to put my hope in the only thing that can actually give me true meaning and purpose—something that can never be taken away. It doesn't spoil, perish, or fade. It's kept because it doesn't have to do with me.

Another mountain lion moment that I've had over the last couple [of] summers has been: I go on an annual backpacking trip with five other friends, and we do five days in a different national park every year. We've been doing it for a number of years now, and it's just—highlight of my year. We do about thirty to fifty miles, whatever, depending on elevation and so on, and it's amazing.

And it puts us in the range of mountain lions every single year. It's terrible. I don't know why I have a unique terror of mountain lions—it's *lions*. Why do we call them cougars and mountain lions? It's like we're deflecting from what they actually are. We live in a land still, today, filled with lions—right?—if you didn't know it—and they're all over our national parks. Anyhow.

So I was only a semi-experienced backpacker when we started doing this. I had only done—three days was my longest adventure. And so I remember, still, the first year, I brought all of this stuff that I did not need—like a big, hardback book. [Tim laughs] I thought I would have these long moments, watching the sunrise in the mountains to read a book—and I usually wanted to sleep because I was so exhausted from what we were doing.

So I carried a book—way too much trail mix—I rubber-banded together, just like, a kitchen fork and spoon and knife from our silverware drawer—an extra pair of pants—you know, this kind of thing. Anyhow, by day four and mile thirty-seven, you are aware of every one of those items in your backpack, right? Because you feel it—right?—on your shoulder muscles. And you're still lugging forty pounds, even though you're over halfway through the trip.

And so paradoxically, what the trivial—ultimately trivial—suffering, right, of my shoulders did on year one was an unwelcome teacher to teach me to be much more of a minimalist, right? And to invest in the super light, weighs-almost-nothing titanium spork, right? And that saved me about—a lot, right there. And to ration the foods, and so on—are you with me? This is a stupid example, right? But it makes sense.

It's like—you and I know, like, suffering, heart pain, physical pain has a way of waking you up. C.S. Lewis said: it's God's, like, "megaphone," to get our attention. Yeah, it has a way of forcing you to think about what really matters and what you really need—which is what that's done for every backpacking trip, for me, after that.

And that's what Peter's getting at here—that's what Frankl was saying: suffering strips away everything you thought you needed. And then you're forced with a decision: what am I going to do with these things? Because these things that we give our lives meaning and hope—they're almost always not bad things.

I love my family dearly, dearly. But I am in grave danger if they are the meaning of my life. They're in grave danger too, right—[Tim laughs] because the pressure I'm putting

[on] them to supply me with the meaning of my life—they'll get crushed under that pressure too, right? So my church community, my dear friends, my hopes for a meaningful career, or something like that—these are good hopes that we have.

But these are precisely the things that are taken away in a moment. And if I define myself by those types of things, who am I when I don't have those things anymore? When I'm melted down by the loss of tragedy and suffering and, just, the course of aging—like, all of those things that will happen to all of us, whether it's in condensed form, or long and drawn out over decades. And it forces you to ask: Who am I really? Who am I really?

And if my identity, and if my hope is in exactly those things that suffering and tragedy can take away in a moment's notice, you and I are just a step away from becoming—as Frankl said—either brutal animals, or zombies—unless my hope is in something more substantial, more real, and that's exactly what Frankl and Peter are inviting us to consider: does such a thing exist?

And to bring us all the way back to the beginning, Peter invites us into this—what I've been calling the stubborn, the “stubborn Christian belief” that regardless of the pain and the horror of human history, or the last twenty-one days, a disciple of Jesus is somebody who refuses to believe that that evil and suffering and pain gets the last word—and it's because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Which leads to the last question that I want us to consider before we go to the bread and the cup—because Peter doesn't answer it here. Notice what Peter doesn't say is, “in God's great mercy, he's given us new birth into a living hope, the hope of *your* resurrection from the dead”—did you catch that? He doesn't say that, does he? He says the resurrection of somebody else: *Jesus*.

Why on earth should my life hope, and the hope of the universe, hinge on somebody else's resurrection from the dead—right? If I'm hoping for something beyond death, shouldn't it be *my* resurrection from the dead? And of course, that's wrapped up—but it doesn't *begin* there. Where it begins is: my hope is built on something outside of myself. Something that happened to Jesus. Why is it that the empty tomb and the risen Jesus are *my hope*—why is that? And it's all locked into this thing that we're about to do, called “taking the bread and the cup.”

On that night that Jesus was betrayed by Peter, and abandoned by his friends—on that night that Jesus wept and grieved in the garden—moments before all of that, he had this meal. It's the meal that we reenact when we take the bread and the cup.

And what Jesus said was that he *knew* that he was about to go through what Viktor Frankl experienced in one to two years—what many of us experience in the course of many years, over decades: the loss and suffering and grief—Jesus was looking into that

dark night because he was going to experience all of that in the next twenty-four hours—the loss of everyone he loved, the abandonment of his friends, the loss of his own life and dignity. He was staring at it, in the face. And why did Jesus do that?

And what he did is: he took these symbols—these Passover symbols, of the bread and the cup—and he said his broken body and his shed blood, it was *for others*. It was *for us* that Jesus was binding himself to the suffering human condition—that Jesus was taking into himself all of the suffering and all of the pain and all of the sin and the consequences for that sin, and all of the evil—he was binding himself to it. He would allow the human condition to overwhelm him and destroy him. Why? Why did He do that?

And it's not an idle question—this isn't "Sunday School 101." Like, look at our world, you guys. What reason is there to hope? And if your coworker, if your family member knows you're a follower of Jesus, the question's bound to come up, like: how do you process this? Like, why on earth—tell me one reason you can look at human history and have hope? We all have smartphones now—it doesn't seem to be helping us. Like, what reason is there to hope?

And here it is—we're going to *eat* the story in a few moments. It's the story that there's something we can take to the bank—it's certain. There's nothing about life that's certain, except if I'm a follower of Jesus, then this one thing: that Jesus isn't a figment of my imagination. He's real. And he really did and said these things. And what he said that night, in that meal, was that his life was being offered in the place of others. He would become what we are so that we could become who he is. And he said he would overcome the grave and all of the pain and evil connected with it, with his resurrection life and with his love.

And so as the empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus—someone else's empty tomb becomes my empty tomb. And the resurrected body of Jesus becomes my hope, because he became what I am, so that I could be what he is. That's the hope that Peter's talking about. It's not "pie in the sky"—it's as real as the Jesus who walked out of the empty tomb.

And Peter says, if I can internalize that and let that transform my outlook on life, all of a sudden, the pain and the grief and the suffering that's unavoidable in our world, it becomes this strange, paradoxical "gift." It's a tragedy to be wept over and truly grieved, but it's also this strange gift, because it's melting me down—it's stripping me away of all of the things that I thought I needed to give meaning to my life, but actually, they're simply gifts to be enjoyed that point me to the greatest gift. And that's the love and commitment that Jesus has to you and to me and to our world, amen?

I'm going to close in prayer—and as we come to worship and take the bread and the cup, a couple of questions to focus on. One might be: as you consider the state of our world—as you consider the intensity of suffering that's on everybody's attention over the last month—will you allow it to focus you? Will you allow it to force you to ask: what are the false hopes and the false identities that you have made your hope, that you define yourself by, and that you need to deal with, or else you will be crushed by the weight of suffering, as you go through your life?

There might be some of us who simply need, once again, to receive the committed love of Jesus, given to us in his life and death and resurrection, as we take the bread and the cup. I don't know what you need to do, but I trust that the Spirit will lead us, that he'll shape us as we worship Jesus, who opens up a living hope through his resurrection from the dead, that has the capacity to make us into new and different kinds of humans, amen?

[EMSB theme fades in]

All right, you guys, thanks for listening to “Exploring My Strange Bible” podcast. Hope this is helpful for you. As always, you can help us by spreading the word if you find this podcast helpful. In the next episodes, we're going to be diving into the stories of the creation's “exodus” in Romans 8 into 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's exploration of the meaning of “resurrection.” And then we'll go to the final pages of the Bible, the book of Revelation after that. So let's keep exploring and keep learning. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.

[EMSB theme fades out]