

Victim or Victor

Each day we have media reports of people who have become victims. One football umpire was a victim of violence as he umpired a football game.

WOMAN basher Nick Stevens's former partner, Laima McKenna, says she is relieved her three-year emotional hell is finally over. He was charged in 2014 and vehemently denied any wrongdoing, accused Ms McKenna of lying, and subjected her to years of courtroom drama. It is only recently that he confessed to his violence.

We have reports about people who have become victims of terrorism; scams; motor car accidents; arson; disease and so the list goes on.

This week there has been another expose of sexual abuse in the Anglican Church and the lack of the people in charge to do anything about it.

In this world of hours it can be easy to develop a victim mentality:

Victim mentality is an acquired (learned) personality trait in which a person tends to regard him or herself as a victim of the negative actions of others, and to behave like it were the case—even in the absence of clear evidence. It depends on habitual thought processes and attribution.

Life can throw us a few curve balls. A job that was once secure is now no more. Going to the doctor for a health check can open a Pandora's box. This happened to a friend of mine last week. Some pains in the chest was not the problem but the tumour on his brain and spine and the shadows on the chest Xray indicated something sinister was happening.

We can develop chronic health problems that are not easy to heal. And so the list goes on.

While I do not wish to minimize the violence or pain and suffering that people go through, and it can be extreme, the challenge is not to see yourself as a victim but through it all become a victor.

This is very much so for the Christian. We can develop a “woe is me” mentality and a belief that God has not heard your prayers. In fact we can believe that He is not interested in your situation. It is easy to become disillusioned and give up on God and the church.

All of us will have experiences where we have felt and been victims of someone’s behaviour and actions or some calamity that certainly was not our fault. Peter in his first letter has some pointers to help us become victors and not victims.

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.(1 Peter 1:1-2)

Firstly he addresses the Christians as aliens, resident foreigners, who are living in an adopted country.

“Aliens” (used also in 2:11) contains two inherent ideas: That we are both foreigners and temporary residents. As foreigners, we do not belong to this evil world. In Jesus’ words, we are in the world, but not of it (John 17:13-16). We should not speak its language or follow its customs. Our behaviour should be distinct from the residents of this world.

In our recent travels, even though we had the same colour skin, we stood out as foreigners not only because of our inability to speak the language, but we did not look like the people of that country.

One of Peter's favourite words is the Greek word, *anastrophe*. He uses it six times in 1 Peter (1:15, 18; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16) and twice in 2 Peter (2:7; 3:11). It is only used five other times in the entire New Testament. It means "way of life" or "behaviour." The point is, as Christians our way of life, our conduct and behaviour should stand out like a foreigner stands out in this country or any other country. We're supposed to be different, as the King James translates 2:9, "a peculiar people." (You're probably thinking, "Yes, I've met many peculiar Christians!") But it doesn't mean weird, but distinct. Christians should stand out as godly people in a corrupt, ungodly world.

Peter makes it clear, as Jesus did, that we are not to become hermits, cloistered from the world, but rather to live commendably in it (2:12, 15, 20-21; 3:13-17; 4:19; 5:9). Nor are we to live apart from the church, as individuals, but in community with other Christians as the people of God (1:22; 2:4-10; 3:8-9; 4:8-11, 17; 5:1-5, 9, 13-14). As someone put it, "We are not to live in the world and go to church, but to live in the church and go to the world." So the word "alien" means that we are foreigners in this evil world.

The second sense of "alien" is that we are temporary residents. We're not to be settlers, but pilgrims, looking for our real home in heaven. Peter brings this out numerous times: 1:6, "for a little while"; 1:17, "during the time of your stay upon earth"; 2:11-12, you are aliens now, but the day of visitation is coming; 4:2, "the rest of the time in the flesh," with the day of judgment to follow (4:5); and, 5:10, "suffered for a little while."

All these people died having faith. They did not receive the things that were promised, yet they saw them in the distant future and welcomed them, acknowledging that they were strangers and foreigners on earth. ...Instead, they were longing for a better country, that is, a heavenly one. (Hebrews 11:13,16)

All of this is most practical to those who are suffering, especially when you look around at wicked people who seem to be doing quite well, and wonder, "Is it worth it to follow Christ?" Sometimes people mock Christianity as a "pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die" religion. Clearly, it is! Paul says that if it's not, "*if we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied*" (1 Cor. 15:19).

I'm thankful for modern medicine, but there's a sense in which it has done us a great disservice. Years ago, people didn't need to be convinced of the shortness of life and the reality of eternity. Most families lost several children in death. Many adults died of things that now can be healed.

Death was a constant reminder of the fact that this life is not all there is. Eternity is ahead. Though we suffer and the wicked prosper now, a day is coming when it will all be made right, just as Jesus Christ promised.

But we often mistakenly assume that because medicine can extend someone's life for a few years, we escape from the reality of eternity! No, says Peter, we're aliens—foreigners, temporary residents—here on earth. We live in a hostile world now, but we're looking for that great day when our Saviour returns from heaven for us!

We are aliens living in a hostile world and thus we can become victims of that hostility. Each week the Australian Prayer Network reports about believers in various countries being victimised and even killed for their faith in Jesus. This is not some Government crackdown but can happen within their local village when someone turns to Christ and then is punished by the other villagers.

We need to rediscover this truth that we are aliens in a foreign land; pilgrims pass on through; immigrants that will leave behind a heritage.

Yes we live in a hostile world as aliens but Peter reminds his readers and us that we live with hope. People going through trials need hope. Peter begins (1:3) by saying that God "has caused us to be born again to a living hope." He instructs us to fix our hope completely on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:13). Since Jesus has been raised from the dead, our faith and hope are in God (1:21; see also 3:5, 15).

Biblical hope is not like worldly hope. Worldly hope is uncertain, at best. We say, "I hope my investment will be profitable." There's a lot of anxiety and not much certainty in that kind of hope! But biblical hope is certain, though not yet realized, because it is backed by the God who cannot lie.

It's as if you and I had both missed the AFL grand final. I heard which team won, but you hadn't. We sit down to watch a videotape of the final game, and I say to you, "Would you like to put a friendly bet on the game?" You'd be a fool to make that bet! Why? Because even though I don't know exactly how the game will develop, I am certain about the final outcome. And Christians may not know exactly how the events of life will unfold, but we know for certain whose side is

going to win. We can be sure of the glory that awaits us in heaven. That's biblical hope!

That is becoming a victor and not a victim.

In the opening greeting, Peter gives three reasons we can live with hope in this hostile world:

A. WE CAN HAVE HOPE BECAUSE WE'VE BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD.

In the Greek text, the word "chosen" comes right after "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." It is put at the start for emphasis. Peter wants us to know from the outset that our relationship with God does not depend on our weak grasp on Him, but rather on God's sure grip on us. Our salvation is not our doing; it is God's doing! Thus we can submit to God during times of trial because He is sovereign in saving and keeping His own. This comforting theme of God's sovereignty runs through the whole book (1:3-5, 11-12, 20; 2:7-10; 3:17, 22; 4:11, 19; 5:10-11).

Christians differ not so much on whether God chose us, but over the basis of that choice. Some fail to understand the significance of the word "foreknow," supposing it means only to know (about) in advance. The word does have this meaning, as seen in Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17. But when Peter uses the word "foreknowledge" here, he speaks of God's choice of us apart from anything we would or could do, based solely on His sovereign grace.

I remember, in primary school, lining up along the wall and being chosen by the best player to be on his team. It was a special feeling that comes over you: this feeling of being wanted and desired to have. I remember not being chosen for the State team and the disappointment that flooded me and the questions of self that are raised when not being chosen.

But the greatest feeling of being chosen was being chosen by God and he wanted me to be on His team. Wow!

B. WE CAN HAVE HOPE BECAUSE WE'VE BEEN SAVED BY THE TRIUNE GOD.

Peter assumed that his readers accepted the Trinity. He doesn't stop to explain or defend it; he just states that we were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that we may obey Jesus Christ. God is one God who exists in three coequal, eternal persons, the same in substance, but distinct in subsistence. Each person of the Godhead has a role in our salvation. We can have hope because our salvation depends on this great Triune God.

If I understand Peter's words correctly, he is describing our salvation as the work of the Trinity, spelled out sequentially in the order actually achieved in time. The Father chose us in eternity past for salvation. The Holy Spirit drew us to faith in Christ, regenerating us, illuminating our minds so as to make the gospel clear, convicting us of sin, and baptizing us into the body of Christ. The result of the Spirit's ministry is obedience to the gospel call, trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, and thus being cleansed by His shed blood. The obedience in view here is not so much the obedience which follows salvation as an evidence that we have a living faith, but the obedience of faith (see Romans 1:5) which results in salvation.

We are victors because we join in the spoils that Christ won for us on the cross: our salvation. Appreciating what Christ has won for us, our salvation, through His suffering on the cross puts into perspective what we are suffering from.

C. WE CAN HAVE HOPE BECAUSE WE HAVE AN FUTURE INHERITANCE

Through Christ's death and resurrection, we have a future inheritance. This inheritance will be ours because Christ died. But it will be ours after we have died (unless, of course, we are alive at the second coming of Christ). Because our hope of future blessings rests in the finished work of our Lord, it is a certain hope.

Peter gives a three-fold description of this hope: it is imperishable, it is undefiled, and it will not fade away. William MacDonald says it is death-proof, sin-proof, and time-proof.

Our inheritance will not deteriorate over time. Perishable fruit tucked away in the back of our refrigerator may be forgotten until a pungent odour brings it to our attention. But our inheritance

is unlike perishable food.

Neither is our inheritance subject to defilement. Someone may try to reserve a piece of cake by defiling it so no one else wants it. But even sin and impurity can never defile our future inheritance.

Thirdly, our inheritance will not “fade away.” Time will not diminish its existence, like things that wear out, nor cause its desirability to diminish. With anything new, time causes its glory to fade. But our inheritance, unlike the glow on Moses’ face in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, never fades.

We can be victors because we have the final victory over time; over death; over sin and over Satan.

Salvation is the vantage point from which our sufferings are to be viewed. To be certain of the future hope of the believer is to be equipped to endure the present sufferings to which we have been called.

How unfortunate that many Christians look at their salvation from their circumstances, rather than looking at their circumstances through their salvation. When some saints suffer, they begin to doubt their salvation and the certainty of their future hope. Other Christians may even encourage such doubts. Some may blame suffering on sin, as Job’s friends counselled him. It was not his sin, but his righteousness which was the occasion for his sin. It was not his downfall, but his growth which God had in view. Neither Job’s friends nor his wife were of any real comfort to him, for they did not point him God-ward, as does Peter. Peter wants us to view our suffering from the standpoint of our security as saints, based upon God’s mercy, grace and power.

Peter teaches us that saints are not “victims” but “victors” in their suffering. The “victim” mindset has become a dominant note in our society. We look to our past, and to the abuse of others, or to the “genes” passed on to us from our parents as the cause of our sin and suffering. Peter turns our eyes toward God and toward the shed blood of His Son, in whom we have not only forgiveness of sins, but victory in Christ. We were not saved merely to cope with life; we were called to be conquerors in Christ. We are overcomers, especially in the trials and tribulations of life. Let us believe and behave accordingly. We are victors not victims. Amen.

Long Service Leave; Liz and I have returned from our adventures through Holland; Germany; Poland; Hungary; Austria and the Czech Republic. Our eyes have been opened to the oppression and suffering that people endured through the reign of Nazism and Communism and the impact that is still there today. We have been inspired by the stories of faith and the people of faith in each of those countries who did not walk away from God. Many lost their lives in the camps. Many walked away from God. But the remnant remained faithful and true.

We were also inspired by the churches and cathedrals, built over a period of 100 years, that stand tall and majestic over the towns. As you enter many of them, you are touched by the presence of God and His awesome power. You are also inspired by the people honoured for their life of faith. Each statue and painting hides a story of faith or not only the person represented but also the person who made it.

I will attach my travel notes for any who may be interested.

Walking Free: We continue to have clients each Tuesday and Thursday and some Saturday mornings as we seek to pray to release God's healing. We have also been praying after church for people suffering from cancer. We have been adding to our prayer arsenal, the "Courts of Heaven" that Hal and Debbie and team have been using. We are waiting to see the fruit of such praying in our clients.

Toowoomba Team: Hal, Debbie, Stephanie and Charmaine have continued to pray for people and camp sites. They have some challenging people to pray for but God is faithful and bringing breakthrough for them.

Seminars: We are seeking God about what to teach and when to teach in the latter half of this year.

Finances: This year we have lost some sponsorship and thus payment to Liz and myself has been less than before. We will be paid about \$10,000 less than last year. We are grateful for what we receive and this drop of income is manageable. We are aware that we are still well off compared to many people. We will continue to seek God about this.

We are looking for more sponsors to support the healing and teaching work of Jesus through Walking Free. No matter how small the donation, we welcome new donors. Remember that each donation to the gift fund is tax deductible. If you would like to become a sponsor, it is a matter of a one off or regular donation to the following:

Walking Free Renewing Ministries Gift Fund

BSB 084-961 ACC 82-215-5845.

Use your name if you would like a tax receipt at the end of the financial year.

Praise God for His provision.

- Thank God for the healing and restoration He is bringing to our clients.
- Thank God for His financial provision for our church.
- Pray for a new treasurer for Walking Free.

- Pray for team in Adelaide who pray for the ministry: Margaret, Lesley, Diana

and Julie

- Please pray for team at Toowoomba: Hal and Debbie, Stephanie, Charmaine and Craig.

Family Life has been busy since we got back. My mother died suddenly on the day we left to go overseas. I thank God that I was there when she died. We have her funeral this week. Our daughter Jess bought a unit at auction. Our granddaughter, Jennifer, celebrated her second birthday last Saturday. Our garden needs to be weeded and minor repairs made. It has been wet and cold since we got back after enjoying 30C weather in Budapest!

Pray for Naomi, Jonathan and Jennifer; Jess; David and Maddy and Elijah.

India: Pray for Pastor Devadas, Pastor CH and Rev Sambabu and their ministry amongst Hindu people. Pray for finances to be release to support families and orphans. Pray for their families and congregations who are suffering from sickness. Pray for God to heal them.

Kenya: Walkingfree church is now two years old. Give thanks to God for the work of Pastor Isaac and his pastors as they spread the gospel in their region. Pray for their protection and health for them and their families.