

**Resurrection Living (1) – 1 Peter 1:1-12 'A living hope' (John 10:7-10)**

What do you hope for? (ASK – 1 minute to neighbour)

Range of answers: loved one to get well (or maybe yourself), a good holiday, a new/better job, summer to arrive, Dons not to get relegated (fantasy not hope) – or Leicester winning league (never thought say that)

**Main theme for today is hope** – passage all about that. Hope a hard word – what is it? 'Looking forward to things being better than they are' – range of levels – from wishful thinking (or blind faith) to a deep and unshakeable conviction. We use it in lots of contexts, but often quite vague. Key phrase for us today – we have **'a living hope'** (v3) – what does that mean for Christians?

Come back to that – set scene – get bibles open (p1217) – really important (like to listen, but what I say only of any value if it helps to explain or illustrate what's in here). My words are just words – this is power, this is transformation. Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday – remember coronation 'most precious things this world affords' – what Peter says here – what we read here is what prophets longed to discover (v10) and what even angels long to know (v12), We can read today what angels would love to have known!

First part of letter – written by Peter – *the* Peter. V1 tells us that it's written to: READ v1 – i.e. general letter to Christians in what is now modern Turkey (first great evangelistic area as church spread outside borders of Israel).

Uses 2 words to describe Christians, 2 'e's – **elect and exiles**. Two great themes of OT – God's people are chosen by God – don't earn it, God lavishes his favour on them because he loves them. 'Elect' but also 'exiles' (old translation 'strangers') – originally fate of Israel for disobeying God but became way they saw themselves. That image became dominant one for church in NT too, and by extension us as well - *not like rest of world*, we serve a different master and learn to live out our faith in different, even hostile cultures.

Not an excuse to disengage from world, but rather to seek to transform it. Not an excuse to change our beliefs but rather to stand up for them, to recognise that they are different. We are exiles – we bind to the gospel rather than bend to the culture.

The good news is that the church has always faced this challenge – it's nothing new. Too many people write as if we are in uncharted waters for the church – no we aren't! Yes the particular challenges of technology and globalisation are new, but the basic challenge of living as a Christian, of being God's people in the world is exactly what it has always been. Peter wrote to the infant church about AD60 with good news and encouragement for how 'exiles' can stand firm – so let's learn from him these next few weeks.

(Preparing for this Sunday, this passage could have been 3 sermons – so will confine myself to those 2-3 mins and get into main part quickly).

Expression 'Gamechanger' – key event that changes everything. 9/11 often described like that, an event which changed the fundamental narrative of world events. Can think of others. Or to use another e.g., Mum's favourite song 'Love changes everything' (ASK) – not quite my style, but lyrics are beautiful and often profound. Selection: 'Love, love changes everything – how we live and how we die. Love will never ever let you be the same.'

Something else changes everything – resurrection. The gamechanger, the event in history after which everything is different. Proves Jesus is Lord. Proves gospel is true. Proves that sin can be forgiven. Also offers new life to all who follow Jesus. How does main part of letter start: READ v3 up to 'new birth'. Get chance to lead brand new lives: QUOTE SONG CHANGING 'LOVE' TO 'RES'

We are born again, just like Jesus said. But how does it work: READ v3b 'through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' Jesus did it, and he now offers it to all who follow him. Worth remembering this is the true meaning of baptism. Water symbol of death – die to old life and then rise again to new life with Jesus. The resurrection changes everything: Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead (Paul's phrase) and now heaven is open, this offer is available to all.

Note: we don't earn it – can't earn your way to new life. Given to us – READ v3a 'mercy', 'given'. We receive it and we praise God as a result.

What does new birth mean? What are we born into? **Two things: (1) v3 'a living hope'**. Like getting a second chance, isn't it? Life now has purpose and meaning, we have something to hope for, we have life with Jesus. What Jesus promises in John 10, our other reading: READ 10:10. New birth brings new hope. What new Christians so often say to me: my life has hope now, I can face the future.

Still begs the question, what are we hoping *for*? Point of hope is it's not yet fully realised, that's why it's hope. As Paul says in Romans 8, 'who hopes for what they already have?' Which brings us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing, which is really the outworking of the first: READ v3-4a. **Our living hope is what Peter calls 'an inheritance which can never perish, spoil or fade'**. What is that inheritance – READ v4b. Our living hope is the hope of eternal life with God in heaven. In case of any doubt, Peter says it again in v9: READ.

Simple message this morning. Back to basics – proper old school sermon. Brothers and sisters, we must start to live again as if heaven is real. As if our inheritance in heaven – with God, forever – is what really matters. It is, after all, where we will spend eternity, rather than the few years we have on this earth.

Reflecting this week that we don't speak much about heaven any more. We tend to focus much more on the here and now, on living as a Christian now, on walking with Christ now, on building the kingdom now, on earth as it is in heaven. And much of that is right. Our faith is meant to inspire us now, and we are called to the work of the kingdom now (as we focused on in the first part of the year, and will do again later in year).

But there is a danger too – that we get caught into thinking that this world is all there is. And we need to recognise that this is also the dominant worldview of our society. Only without the God bit. In the past, people tended just to believe that they would automatically go to heaven when they died. But we've gone beyond that now – I think most people simply don't believe in heaven and hell anymore. 80% of funerals in MK are conducted by civil celebrants. My impression is that very few of those are on principle, atheists deliberately choosing a non-religious ceremony. Mostly I think people are so unconcerned as to what happens after death that they don't see the need for a Christian funeral, even just in case it's true. That should shock us, and tell us where many people are really at in terms of what they believe: no sin, no judgement, no hell, no eternity.

We must be very careful that our focus on living for God now is not just a form of worldliness. Church leader called Craig Groeschel wrote a very provocative book a few years ago called 'The Christian Atheist.' The central idea is that lots of us who call ourselves Christians effectively live as if God doesn't exist, that there is no spiritual world, no eternal reality. There's only now. It's how the world lives – and we get sucked into it. We plan everything around our comfort now and our prosperity in the future. We work our whole lives in the hope of a period of healthy retirement when we can enjoy life's pleasures. And sometimes we get that, and often we don't. My mum was diagnosed with the return of her cancer weeks before she and dad retired in their mid-60s. Alise's mum was diagnosed with Alzheimer's two years after John retired. Life is uncertain. But it has always been like this. Peter talks openly in this passage (v6) about 'grief in all kinds of trials'. It is the human condition.

But I have good news this morning. **Heaven is real and heaven is open.** I've realised that we make a terrible mistake when we dismiss talk of heaven as pie in the sky when you die. We need a strong theology of heaven as our inspiration when life is tough. About a century ago the Western church sort of gave up on the reality of heaven as being insufficiently motivating for people suffering life's trials. First World War had a lot to do with that. But you know, they were wrong. Life is hard, but it is short. Short compared with eternity. I find the idea of the promise of eternal perfection and peace immensely motivating in the face of life's trials. To know that this life is *not* all there is. There is a real hope, a living hope. That whatever life throws at us there is something better on its way.

And best of all, not only does it not perish, it doesn't spoil or fade either. Really important to spot those two extra words. Heaven won't get boring. Struck by that this week – had a wonderful holiday. All-inclusive, so could eat what we wanted when we wanted, sun was out, nice pool, good attractions nearby. It was a holiday in original sense – a holy-day, a foretaste of heaven. But my knees still hurt every time I went up or down stairs. I still woke several times in the night thinking about difficult things back here. Basically it wasn't perfect, *and* the memory will fade, almost as quickly as the tan. If you try and create heaven here, it doesn't work. Heaven is in heaven! Let's live as if that was really true. Not as an escape from reality, but as the ultimate reality, the foundational truth of all existence, and the one that brings us what Peter calls in v8 'inexpressible and glorious joy' – and why would it, READ v9.

As I close, one last story. As my mum was dying I found myself wondering if believing in heaven would really make a difference. How would she face death? How would I feel after she was gone? What I experienced then, and was reminded this week, is that the reality of heaven makes all the difference. Mum faced her end with such peace, and she did that because she knew where she was going. And I felt great comfort because I too knew she was in a far better place. May we all have grace again to live the true life of the resurrection, to live with the sure knowledge, the living hope, that heaven is real – and heaven is open. Amen.