

11th May 2025 – Reflection: Resurrection Living (1) – 1 Peter 1:1-12 ‘A living hope’

Here’s a question to kick off today: what do you hope for? No doubt that question would generate a range of answers: maybe for yourself or a loved-one to get well, a good holiday, a new or better job, for the warm weather to continue this time. Or maybe it’s for something bigger: for more peace in the world, less exploitation, for our planet to survive.

Today we begin a new series in the wonderful first letter written by St Peter. It’s not a bad effort for a fisherman, with little formal education! That’s the effect that Jesus has on someone. And it reminds me of that lovely encounter on the beach after the resurrection, when Jesus restores his friend and says: ‘Feed my sheep.’ Peter is certainly doing that in this amazing little book.

And as we begin today, **our main theme is hope.** Hope is a much misunderstood word in our society, often reduced to wishful thinking. But as I’ve shared before, hope is not just wishful thinking: it is the confident expectation that one day things will be better than they are now. Whatever you hope for, hope is something inspirational, motivating – it gets us out of bed in the morning, puts unexpected peace and joy in our hearts during the day, and enables us to sleep at night.

So, **knowing where to find hope is like knowing where to mine for gold.** Think of all the gold rushes that sent hundreds of thousands of people migrating across continents, creating whole new communities and industries because they thought they could find gold there. We need a ‘hope rush’ at present – to know where we can find true hope, and to invest heavily in that.

And Peter is writing to these small, hard-pressed Christian communities precisely to offer that real hope. It’s fascinating how he starts – who does he address the letter to? Christians are described using two words, 2 ‘e’s – **elect and exiles.** Both words are laden with meaning, they really define two great themes of the Old Testament: first, God’s people are chosen, by God himself – we don’t earn it, God lavishes his favour on us because he loves us. So we are ‘elect’ i.e. chosen – but we are also ‘exiles’ (old translation had it as ‘strangers’). This was the fate promised to Israel if they abandoned God, but as the history of God’s people wore on, it also became the way they saw themselves.

That image of being strangers, exiles in the world became the dominant one for the early church, too, and by extension us as well – followers of Jesus are not like the rest of the world, we serve a different Master and learn to live out our faith in different, even hostile cultures. That’s not an excuse to disengage from the world, but rather to seek to transform it. And it’s clear from the rest of the letter that this is exactly what the Christians he’s writing to are doing. They are distinctive, and one of Peter’s messages is: don’t give up. Keep going.

And he begins this motivational letter with the most important reason to keep going: (v3) ‘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.’ **The resurrection is the ultimate gamechanger.** A radical new power has broken into the world. Death is no longer the final end: Jesus has conquered it. **Jesus is our living hope** – living forever, glorified forever, the Word made flesh, who reigns over all. Nothing can defeat him now – his will be the victory.

Wow! That’s not a bad place to start, is it? This is why we’re doing this short series after Easter, because this little letter roots everything in the good news of the resurrection. A resurrection which Peter himself had witnessed, of course. He speaks of what he knows, what he has seen.

So what are the consequences of this unbreakable hope? The rest of the passage gives us three amazing outcomes: **first, this hope ‘can never perish spoil or fade.’** In fact Peter calls it an inheritance. Usually inheritances are only released by someone else – uniquely this one is released by our *own* death! We inherit at that point, because this inheritance is ‘kept in heaven for us’.

Heaven is real, and when you think about it, you'll spend a lot more time there than the few years you get on this earth. When life is good, that attitude seems a bit po-faced. But for people facing real crises, relentless challenges, even the steady decline of their own health – isn't it good news to know that this isn't all there is? That there is something way, way better than even the best of what we have now. Our living hope can never perish spoil or fade. Hallelujah.

And because of that, the second thing we see in our passage is that this living hope **carries us through the dark times**. And it's clear from Peter's letter that his readers were experiencing plenty of those – he talks of them suffering 'grief in all kinds of trials.' (v6)

When life forces our head down, we need to look up – up to our true and living hope. And this is one of those passages which must have inspired the famous 'Footprints in the sand story'. (If you don't immediately recognise that name, google it!)

Today we're also remembering the 80th anniversary of VE Day. And as I reflected in one of this week's Daily Inspirations, I was struck by something I read in an article by Sheila Hancock about what VE Day was really like for much of the population: 'Yes, in 1945 we were relieved that the bombs and doodlebugs and rocket weapons had stopped, and we heard there was fun going on in the West End of London – but where I lived it was less jubilant. The war there felt far from over: we were still waiting anxiously for the return of the young lad next door from the rumoured horror of a Japanese prisoner of war camp, and many of my friends were trying to accept as fathers strange men they barely knew... I imagine the grownups were utterly exhausted and often grief-stricken.'

It's easy to look at the photos of central London on 8th May 1945 and assume everyone was just having a big party. But actually, many people were just exhausted; and there was still a long, hard road ahead. As Peter observes, even gold perishes – we need something to hold onto which goes deeper. And here is where it might be useful to notice that Peter talks about our inheritance being one that not only doesn't perish, it doesn't spoil or fade either. Even our best experiences of life are usually diluted in some way. But our living hope doesn't spoil or fade.

80 years ago the generation that survived the war had a much stronger grasp of these realities than their children or grandchildren. But maybe, their great-grandchildren are starting to appreciate those more again. Since 2018 the number of 18-24s who connect with church regularly has increased from 4% to 16%, and to 21% among young men. That's a four- or five-fold increase in 7 years! **A new generation is looking for living hope – and in Christ they find it.**

Which leads to our third outcome: **this hope 'concerns our salvation'**. You see, we don't just need hope for a better life – we need to be saved *from* something first. What Peter calls the sufferings and glories of the Messiah served a purpose. They dealt with our greatest enemies: sin, evil and death. Our hope is not self-help – it is restoration to our true selves, and only God can accomplish it in us. Perhaps that's why so many young people are coming back to faith. We now have a society which apparently offers us everything, but very little of it actually helps. Much of it makes things worse. Our phones are full of precious metals... but people want something of greater worth than gold.

In Jesus we find it. We find a hope which concerns our salvation, carries us through trials and can never perish spoil or fade. The long peace in Europe after the Second World War, almost unparalleled in human history, has come to an end. Times are anxious again. How we need Peter's words today. I'll close with the final responses used during the service at Westminster Abbey on 8th May 1945, and may they also be our final response today:

'O give thanks to the Lord, for He is gracious: and His mercy endures forever. Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name we give praise: for your loving mercy and your truth's sake.' **Amen.**