

## Lesson 2 – A Living Hope – 1 Peter 1:3-12

### Essential message of the text

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Peter begins with a doxology, a prayer of praise that introduces the dominant themes of the letter. He restores hope with an ecstatic, unbroken outburst of praise to a God who sustains us. To those who feel alienated in a strange world, Peter points us to our true home. He reestablishes eternity with God as the soul's true reference point. He tells us of a God who births us into his own family, sustains us in the here and now with a hope that will not die, and shields us until the time he gives us our full inheritance.

**New birth** is God's genetic overhaul of spiritual life, placing us in heaven's lineage. God, as both creator (4:19) and father (1:14) brings us into an intimate unfolding of his life in us. His holy character becomes the dominant force shaping our identity (1:16-17). Once this new identity takes hold, we begin to see our old life for what it really was and develop a taste for something that is more satisfying. God gives us new tastes to filter out the cheap substitutes. When we taste God (2:3), nothing else satisfies so deeply, and we begin to "crave pure spiritual milk so that...you may grow up in your salvation" (2:2). The new birth helps us to see that nothing satisfies the soul like the Father's mercy. We have an eternal seed (1:23) that begins to reshape us out of heaven's mold, making us increasingly unfit for the world's mold. We begin a metamorphosis into heavenly way of life that accentuates the difference between us and those who do not share this identity, which sometimes makes us feel alone and isolated in the world. We truly become "aliens and strangers in the world" (2:11) who have a much greater destination. So, when we feel the world sucking us back into its moral vacuum, Peter says, "Remember whose you are, you have been born again. God has pulled you out of a degrading life and has given you his eternal seed to nurture you into heaven. Do not abort the process. Go full term with God."

- **Into a legitimate, living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead – 1:3**  
Christian hope is beyond naïve, abstract optimism, but is grounded in the historic reality of Christ's resurrection as a guarantee of the eventual outcome of Christian commitment. It is therefore a "living" hope against a futile, dead hope that trusts in something that cannot deliver what it promises.
- **Into a secure inheritance – 1:4-5**  
This continues the analogy of new birth. Some of Peter's original recipients may have been disowned and disinherited, contributing even more to their sense of alienation, isolation, and hopelessness. Five word picture underscore the eternal, exceeding value of our assurance:
  - Imperishable (*aphtharton*) – no death or decay
  - undefiled (*amianton*) – no uncleanness or moral impurity
  - Unfading (*amaranton*) – no ravages of time
  - Kept in heaven for those who are *shielded* by God's power
- **Until the coming salvation – 1:5**  
Salvation is probably meant in its broadest sense here. The term by itself 'describes deliverance of various sorts, including military threats, sickness, physical danger, and sin. Peter views salvation comprehensively, envisioning deliverance of God's people from oppression on earth as well as from God's final judgement (4:19).'<sup>1</sup>

### Redemptive suffering as a test of faith in light of the hope of Christ's glory – 1:6-9

"Suffering grief" conveys the idea of emotional anguish. Peter says this suffering is not pointless, but is both purposeful and necessary (1:6, "had to"), to "result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1:7). The suffering is a refinement, similar to the process where metal ore is heated to such a high degree that the impurities are separated, and the purified gold is

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Edwards, *1 Peter: The Story of God Commentary* (Zondervan, 2017), 40.

revealed. The resurrection assures the “end result” of our story, the salvation of our souls (i.e., whole persons), so we can have “inexpressible joy” without even having seen the risen Christ.

“There is no way we will be lost in the process of suffering. No disorder, no disease, not even death itself can weaken or threaten God’s ultimate protection over our lives. No matter what the calamity, no matter what the disappointment or depth of pain, no matter what kind of destruction occurs in our bodies at the time of death, our souls are divinely protected.<sup>2</sup>

### **Participation in the sovereign unfolding of God’s future – 1:10-12**

Just as the prophets who foretold of the wonder of salvation now experienced in Christ were not fully aware of when and how it would transpire, so we, without knowing everything that lies before us, can look to the past as precedent – i.e., God always finishes what he starts.

### **Foundation of our Living Hope – Resurrection as Historical Fact and Certain Promise**

#### **Reasonable hope**

When Paul testified about the resurrection before King Agrippa and Festus in Acts 26, Festus thought it was ludicrous, and interrupted, “Paul, your great learning has made you mad!” (Acts 26:24). Paul responded: *“I am not insane, most excellent Festus. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.”* (Acts 26:25–26)

Note how Paul characterizes his testimony to the resurrection. First, it was “true,” or legitimate, i.e., it was not a “false witness.” Second, it was “reasonable,” appealing to our natural sense of what is intellectually credible. Third, “it was not done in a corner,” the reality of it was publicly recognized and verifiable.

Paul’s statement reflects the claim of all early Christian preaching, that the events of Jesus’ life, including the death, resurrection, and ascension, were not a matter of private opinion or mystical revelation, but were clearly established public facts. What Peter said regarding Jesus’ transfiguration, that it was not a “cleverly devised story” but a matter of credible “eyewitness” testimony (2 Peter 1:16), was also claimed by John regarding the physical life of Jesus generally (1 John 1:1-3), and by Luke regarding the resurrection (Luke 24:39-43; Acts 1:3). The early disciples regarded this as an essential feature of authentic Christian witness (Acts 1:8, 21-22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:20, 33; et al.). In 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Paul’s recounting of the resurrection appearances – to Cephas, to the Twelve, to five hundred at once, to James, to the rest of the apostles, and to him – was a basic and repeated discipline of gospel proclamation.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul provides the two main claims of the early Christians regarding the resurrection: the empty tomb and the physical appearances of Jesus in his resurrected body. First, regarding the empty tomb, note Paul’s reference to the “burial” of Jesus, not just his death, which underscores the complete physical nature of his death and entombment. The tomb was empty. There was no plausible explanation by the Romans or the Jews. There was no credible presentation of the decaying body of Jesus outside of the tomb. The most reasonable explanation was the witness that Jesus had been raised out of the tomb.

Second, as to the physical appearances of the resurrected Jesus, Peter Williams gives the list:

The resurrected Jesus is recorded as appearing in Judea (Mt 28:9; Lk 24:31, 36) and in Galilee (Mt 28:16–20; Jn 21:1–23), in town (Lk 24:36) and countryside (Lk 24:15), indoors (Lk 24:36) and outdoors (Mt 28:9,16; Lk 24:15; Jn 21:1–23), in the morning (Jn 21:1–23) and the evening (Lk 24:29,36; Jn 20:19), by prior appointment (Mt 28:16) and without prior appointment (Mt 28:9; Lk 24:15,34,36; Jn 21:1–23), close (Mt 28:9, 19; Lk 24:15,36; Jn

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<sup>2</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Hope Again: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), 17.

21:9–23) and distant (Jn 21:4–8), on a hill (Mt 28:16) and by a lake (Jn 21:4), to groups of men (Jn 21:2; 1 Cor 15:5,7) and groups of women (Mt 28:9), to individuals (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5,7–8) and groups of up to five hundred (1 Cor 15:6), sitting (Jn 21:15 implied), standing (Jn 21:4), walking (Lk 24:15; Jn 21:20–22), eating (Lk 24:43; Jn 21:15), and always talking (Mt 28:9–10, 18–20; Lk 24:17–30, 36–49; Jn 20:15–17, 19–29; 21:6–22). Many are explicitly close-up encounters involving conversations. It is hard to imagine this pattern of appearances [recorded] in the Gospels and early Christian letters without there having been multiple individuals who claimed to have seen Jesus risen from the dead.<sup>3</sup>

The sheer number of people involved, and the diverse circumstances defies any attempt at disproving the claim as psychological wish fulfillment, hallucinations, or ecstatic visions. As Tim Keller says.

So we are left with two hard-to-refute facts: that the tomb was empty and that hundreds of people claimed to have seen the risen Christ. If we had only the empty tomb, then we could plausibly claim the body was stolen. If we only had the testimonies, we could say they had to be fantasies. Together, however, they give evidence that something extraordinary happened. N. T. Wright says that if you rule out a resurrection, you have a formidable challenge—to come up with a historically possible alternate explanation for these two facts, as well as for the birth of the church itself. He writes:

The early Christians did not invent the empty tomb and the meetings or sightings of the risen Jesus. . . . Nobody was expecting this kind of thing; no kind of conversion experience would have invented it, no matter how guilty (or how forgiven) they felt, no matter how many hours they pored over the scriptures. To suggest otherwise is to stop doing history and enter into a fantasy world of our own.<sup>4</sup>

## Full Hope

In a popular essay by C. S. Lewis, “On Living in an Atomic Age” (1948), he addressed the fear many Christians had that nuclear weapons could “totally destroy all civilization itself.” He uses it as an opportunity to reveal the futility of any understanding of the universe that is purely natural.

“Nature does not, in the long run, favour life. If Nature is all that exists — in other words, if there is no God and no life of some quite different sort somewhere outside Nature — then all stories will end in the same way: in a universe from which all life is banished without possibility of return. It will have been an accidental flicker, and there will be no one even to remember it. . . . infinitesimally short in relation to the oceans of dead time which preceded it and follow it.”<sup>5</sup>

One might call this “ultimate oblivion.” If this is the final reality, it makes all love, laughter, and relationships as well as all callings of politics and the common good pointless. Paul says that without the resurrection, “our preaching is useless and so is your faith” and “we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

Christianity is the only religion or belief system that provides a hope that completely answers the human existential need for transcendent meaning beyond our temporal, natural existence. In Hinduism and Buddhism, ultimately, we do not live on as persons but as part of the universal soul like a dew drop would become a part of the ocean. Islam has some sense of an ethereal paradise.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Crossway, 2018), 134-135, in Timothy Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear: The Resurrection and the Meaning of Easter* (Penguin Books, 2021), 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>5</sup> C. S. Lewis, “On Living in an Atomic Age,” in *Present Concerns: Essays by C.S. Lewis*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 73–80.

But only Christianity, through the resurrection, provides the full hope of the new heavens and the new earth. There, all that is truly right and wrong will culminate in a place of perfect righteousness (justice). There, every longing for reconciliation in relationships will be fulfilled. There, the restoration of all the good we ever had but has faded and the good we longed for but never had in body, mind, and soul will become an eternal reality. This is full hope. As Peter says, it “can never perish, spoil, or fade” (1 Peter 3:4).

### **Realistic hope**

The only hope one can have in a purely naturalistic sense is the naïve optimism in human potential that makes the world an increasingly better place to live, perhaps at times through the dialectic of opposing forces clashing and revealing a synthesis of something better. History reveals the futility of this belief.

Christian hope, on the other hand, is tied to the story of Jesus who went through suffering, through death, and then to the resurrection and glory. Christian hope, grounded in the realities of human tragedy, allows us to interpret even the deepest anguish through the experience of Jesus, redeeming the “suffering of grief in all kinds of trials.”

“These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:7-9)

### Discussion:

- Read slowly through the text privately or in your group. Pause to repeat or reflect on a word or phrase that nourishes your soul.
- What aspect of hope speaks most strongly into your life right now?
  - New birth (1:3)
  - Living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1:3)
  - Secure inheritance (1:4-5)
  - Guaranteed deliverance / the coming salvation (1:5)
  - Redemptive suffering (1:6-9)
  - Participation in the sovereign unfolding of God’s future (1:10-12)?
  - Reasonable hope
  - Full hope
  - Realistic hope
- What truth from this text do you wish you could speak strongly into our current cultural situation?