

Good News - Eternity - 1 Peter 1:3-9

What do you think about the future of Planet Earth? I'm just about old enough to remember when the visions of the future were filled with optimism and Disney style positivity, when people flew around in their own space ship on a delightful adventure of doing good. But over the last 20 years the visions of the future seem to have become increasingly bleak. Popular films like The Hunger Games capture a very dark, bleak, frightening future, that are fed by the bad news outlets and social media that pour out an unrelenting torrent, of the darkness and brokenness in our world, war, disease, crime, malpractice, moral failures, impending environmental doom, tell us essentially that the world is going to hell in a hand-basket.

Where do you stand? Bleak or Hopeful?

We've been living thro' a really tough period for the world too. Lockdowns, confined to our homes and flats. Funerals where loved ones have been unable to attend. The most vulnerable stuck alone in care homes. Celebration and singing stopped. Millions jobless. Students and children having their education constantly disrupted. Chaos - darkness. Yet in the darkness, we've also seen incredible acts of heroism and self-sacrifice. Health care and public workers going above and beyond the call of duty, businesses and churches stepping in to care for the poor and needy

But many of us have been living with fear and anxiety for a very long time, and it takes its toll. Thankfully, with the development of the vaccines things are looking more positive. (It was lovely to see Sarah Gilbert and Andrew Pollard given a standing ovation at Wimbledon). But what we all need is **a sure hope** to lift us from the darkness. Let's look at 1 Peter, it's a fabulous place to make sense of finding Good News and hope in the midst of suffering.

1 Peter 1:3-9 "3 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, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 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 honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 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, 9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Peter is telling the recipients of this letter in his day – and us – that the way you're going to thrive, the way you're going to get through suffering is by holding on to your hope. *1 Peter 1:3 "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,"*

Now, in the midst of any crisis you're going to get people offering false or empty hope. What the coronavirus pandemic has brought to the surface is our inability to deal with death and a very real fear of it. **Fear of death.** It's such a common fear. How do people outside of the Christian faith deal with the fear of death? This week I discovered there was a Wikipedia article about how to overcome the fear of death.

1 Understand that life is a cycle. People are born, people die and more people are born. Don't fear that you're being singled out and that you have to fear death! In other words, stuff happens! Deal with it!

2 - Live life the way you're supposed to. Don't waste your time worrying about death! Instead, fill each day with as much joy as possible and don't let bad things get you down. Fill your life with good things, people, hobbies, holidays - Which, is not very helpful if you're in a nursing home.

3 - Just do anything that will take your mind off dying! Dance! party! Get a tattoo! Get busy, Take a cooking class, Do anything to take your mind off the fact that one day you will die.

Now, empty hope will not carry us through real suffering, through the death of a loved one. Or the loss of our jobs, or shattered dreams. Peter offers us a living hope. What is a living and sure hope?

Hope in the Bible is not the same thing as optimism. Hope is NOT just having a positive frame of mind. Trying really hard to see the bright side of life..... The Bible says that the way you and I find hope is by making sure that we bank on, that we trust in, something sure and solid that will sustain us in the future no matter what! A dozen times in the NT, the Bible calls us to put our hope in Christ.

What have and are you pinning your hope on during this pandemic? Are you pinning your hope on a politician's promise? Are you simply sitting tight hoping that it will all go away? Here's what Peter says is the foundation for a christian's sure and living hope:

1 Peter 1:3 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, Ed Clowney, who's a NT scholar, said "Our hope is anchored in the past: Jesus rose! Our hope remains in the present: Jesus lives! Our hope is completed in the future: Jesus is coming!" I can have hope in any situation – because I have bet my life on this one sure thing – Jesus who was crucified for my sins rose from the dead! And his resurrection guarantees that if I have united myself with this risen Christ, I will be raised from the dead. And not only me, but everyone who unites themselves with the risen Christ through faith, all of you will be raised from the dead too! – Death is not the end – death has been swallowed up in victory!!

But how can we be sure that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is real? That's it's not just like Wikipedia advice or a second hand car salesman patter? The case for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is stronger today than it's ever been. There is a new generation of biblical scholars who have been examining in a fresh way the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the foundation of Christian hope. New Testament historians like Gary Habermas and Mike Licona are authors of a wonderful book called ***The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus***.

They've proposed a new way of making the argument for the certainty of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. They call their argument the "minimal facts" approach. What they are saying in their book essentially is let's look at the lowest common denominator of the facts, that all New Testament historians agree to whether they are Christians or not and see what case that makes!

They argue there are 4 key facts.

Fact 1 – Jesus died by crucifixion - Jesus' death on a cross is undisputed by historians. Virtually no New Testament historian or any historian of the Greco Roman period of history disputes this solid fact. Jesus of Nazareth certainly died by crucifixion.

Fact 2 – Jesus' tomb was empty - New Testament historians agree that not only the gospel's witnesses, but Roman and Jewish witnesses all concur that the tomb Jesus was buried in was later found empty.

Fact 3 – Many people reported meeting the risen Jesus - This is agreed upon by the believing and nonbelieving historians. Lots of people claimed that they met the risen Jesus.

Fact 4 – The early church grew explosively after Jesus was crucified - Everyone agrees about that fact. It's really important to remember that the claim to be the Messiah was not uncommon in the first century. Would-be messiahs other than Jesus drew lots of followers. The only difference is that when these other people were killed by the Romans, their followers went home or found themselves a new messiah. But Jesus' followers were absolutely unique. They went everywhere proclaiming our Messiah died on a cross for the sins of the world, but God raised him from the dead!

4 facts -Jesus died by crucifixion/Jesus' tomb was empty/ People reported meeting the risen Christ/The Christian church grew explosively after Jesus was crucified The authors argue convincingly in their book that there is no alternative theory that better accounts for these four facts than this one truth – **Jesus Christ was raised from the dead**. What we're pinning our hope on in the midst of this pandemic and any other threat to our lives is a sure thing, a certain thing – the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christian hope is not just a sure hope, it's a Realistic hope. Peter is not a preacher of a prosperity gospel –Peter is saying – whether you are rich or poor, whatever race, education or demographic you come from, have faith or none, are Cofe, catholic, Pentecostal, very moral or immoral person, no-one can escape from suffering in this world. Christian hope is a realistic hope found in suffering.

There was a famous Senior US Navy POW in Vietnam who was once asked - who didn't make it out alive from POW camps. He answered – the optimists. The reporter said: "I don't understand. I thought optimism got us through hard times." The POW said "The optimists kept saying: We're going to get out. We're going to be out by Christmas. Then, We're going to be out by Easter.. And then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart." Optimists will not get us out of suffering, the pandemic or death itself. Neither will pessimists, either, running around saying the sky is falling - there is no hope.

Christians look at the world realistically. We look all the unpleasantness squarely in the eye, but then we say: "Nevertheless, we will prevail! We will win in the end!" We have set our hope on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even death will not defeat us! – Death is not the end

Christians have a Glorious hope. We have a secure future with God, we have the promise of Jesus returning, and a new heaven and new earth. C.S. Lewis, wrote a wonderful essay years ago called "The Weight of Glory". We can only enter heaven like a child and that as we do we will radiate the glory, brightness, splendour, luminosity of Our God We are going to shine like the sun... United perfectly to His beauty. In other words, one day the trials we've experienced in this life will pass away.death will be no more We'll not only see God's glory, but his glory will shine in us and through us. We will be filled with God's glory, God's Splendour! What an awesome future

There will be dark times ahead for all of us! But Good News, for those of you who have entrusted your lives to Christ will one day shine like the sun. We will prevail! We will win! And we will be filled with the glory of God!

Let's pray