

Hope is often described not just as a passive wish, but as an active, daily choice to believe that something better is possible. It is built through connections with things or people, our actions, and even through our inner resilience.<sup>1</sup> Hope, where do you get your hope?... Hope

A little blind boy was flying a kite when a pastor asked him, “How do you know your kite is up there? You can’t see it.” The boy answered, “Because I can feel the tug of the string in my hand.”<sup>2</sup> In one way or another, humanity has always felt that tug. Across cultures and centuries, people have reached toward life beyond the grave. Ancient Egyptians filled tombs with texts, amulets, and provisions for the dead, hoping for safe passage and renewed life.<sup>3</sup> Mesopotamian epics wrestled with death and the human longing to outlast it.<sup>4</sup> Hindu traditions spoke of rebirth, karma, and the soul’s long journey;<sup>5</sup> Zoroastrianism taught judgment and a final triumph of good over evil;<sup>6</sup> Greeks placed a coin with the dead for the ferryman of the underworld; and in many parts of Asia, ancestor veneration expressed the conviction that the dead remain bound to the living.<sup>7</sup> Humanity has rarely been content to believe that death is the end.

This is probably the most important sermon I will ever preach, so listen carefully:

## INTRODUCTION

When we read Psalm 16:1–11, Acts 2:14a, 22–32, John 20:19–31, and 1 Peter 1:3–9 together, a single golden thread begins to appear. The New Testament does not present resurrection as a detached miracle floating above suffering. Rather, it presents resurrection as God’s vindication of the crucified Jesus, who obeyed, suffered, died, and was raised. In Jesus Christ, God fulfilled his promise of salvation and life through the atoning death and victorious resurrection of his Son: by his death, Jesus bore sin; by his resurrection, he broke the power of death; and now he gathers a holy people to live in his peace, stand in his living hope, and bear his risen life in a fearful world.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psych Central. “8 Examples of Hope.” December 10, 2009; Long, Katelyn N. G., Eric S. Kim, Ying Chen, Matthew F. Wilson, Everett L. Worthington Jr, and Tyler J. VanderWeele. “The Role of Hope in Subsequent Health and Well-Being for Older Adults: An Outcome-Wide Longitudinal Approach.” *Global Epidemiology* 2 (November 2020): 100018. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloepi.2020.100018>.

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, “The Hope of the Resurrection,” sermon transcript, Grace to You, April 11, 1971, and “The Answer to Life’s Greatest Question, Part 1,” Grace to You, August 24, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art describes Egyptian tombs, proper burial, the *Book of the Dead*, and funerary amulets as part of Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife.

<sup>4</sup> In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*...

<sup>5</sup> On Hindu teachings about karma, samsara, rebirth, and release, see Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Hinduism: Karma, samsara, and moksha,” “Karma,” and “Samsara.”

<sup>6</sup> On Zoroastrian judgment, cosmic struggle, and the final defeat of evil, see Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Zoroastrianism.”

<sup>7</sup> On ancestor veneration in East Asia, see Encyclopaedia Britannica on Chinese ancestor worship, Qingming in China, and Bon/Obon in Japan.

<sup>8</sup> This central formulation draws together the linked themes of promise, crucifixion, resurrection, peace, hope, and the formation of a holy people, which is the gold thread running through Psalm 16:1–11, Acts 2:14a, 22–32, John 20:19–31, and 1 Peter 1:3–9.

## THE GOLDEN THREAD

That is the thread these readings share. Psalm 16 gives the promise in seed form. Acts 2 declares that the promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. John 20 shows what that fulfillment looks like when the risen Lord steps into a fearful room. 1<sup>st</sup> Peter then explains what the same resurrection means for believers who are suffering and scattered. These passages come from different writers and settings, but they are not moving in different directions. They are telling one story, keep listening...

This matters because Christians are often tempted to read the Bible as a collection of disconnected sayings; just like I am doing right here... Here is a line from the Psalms lifted out for comfort; next is a verse from Acts used as proof of a revealed promise; and we have a scene from John that can be treated as private inspiration, with a paragraph from 1 Peter for encouragement in hard times: I am not done...

But Scripture asks to be read more carefully than that... **Scripture** actually demands our careful reading and intense focus: **Hebrews 2:1**, which commands paying "much closer attention" to the message of Christ to avoid drifting away. **Joshua 1:8** (meditating day and night), **2 Timothy 2:15** ("rightly handling the word of truth"), and **Acts 17:11** (examining scriptures daily). You see, promise and fulfillment belong together. The Gospel and the Epistle belong together. Resurrection and holiness belong together. If we separate these texts, we can still say many true things, but we may miss the main point they make together.<sup>9</sup>

## MAIN POINT

And what do they say together? They say that the gospel of God is not only that Jesus died for sins, important as that is, but that Jesus Christ is risen, and because he is risen, God's saving plan has moved from promise into fulfillment, from prophecy into presence, from fear into peace, and from grief into living hope. Easter peace, therefore, is not a cheap grace (but is rather costly). It is crucified-and-risen peace.

Psalm 16 begins with refuge, trust, and joy in the presence of God. David confesses, "*I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken*" (Ps. 16:8, NIV). Then he reaches the line that becomes central for the church's reading of the psalm: "*because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay*" (Ps. 16:10, NIV). In its first setting, the psalm is a real expression of trust. David knows that life is found in the Lord, not in idols. He knows that false gods multiply sorrow. He knows that the path of life is found in the presence of God.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Barclay, *A Catechism and Confession of Faith* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1837).

But the psalm also reaches beyond David. David did die, he was buried, and he did see decay. So, Psalm 16 is **not less than** David's testimony, but **it is more**. The Spirit carries David's words beyond David's own life toward the Messiah. The promise is larger than the first singer. That is one of the beautiful ways Scripture works: a seed is planted early, and only later do we see the full tree. This psalm begins as a song of trust, but it leans forward into resurrection hope.<sup>10</sup>

Acts 2 brings that hidden movement into the open. Peter stands up on the day of Pentecost and preaches Jesus plainly. He speaks of Jesus' mighty works, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. Then he says that death could not hold him. That is not a rhetorical flourish. It is Peter's way of declaring that God has kept his word. When Peter turns to Psalm 16, he is not using it as a random proof-text. He is showing that what God promised beforehand has now been fulfilled in Christ. David spoke prophetically, and the risen Jesus is the true reference of the psalm.

So, resurrection is not an interruption of God's plan. It is the public revelation that God's plan has reached its appointed center. The cross was not the collapse of the story, and Easter was not an emergency repair. The resurrection was always where the story was going. Resurrection is not a poetic way of saying that Jesus lives on in memory or feeling. It means that God truly raised Jesus from the dead and began the new creation in him.<sup>11</sup>

That same movement of Words also shows us why holiness belongs at the center of the gospel rather than at its edges. The risen Christ is not raised merely to reassure private souls. He is raised as the Holy One who gathers a **holy people**. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 is not only about what happened to Jesus; it is also about what happens to those who now belong to him: the **Spirit of God** is poured out, and a **People** are formed. Resurrection leads to the creation of a **community** (Koinonia) whose life is being reordered under the living rule of Christ. That emphasis resonates deeply with the early Friends' longing for "Primitive Christianity Revived," not the launching of a sect, but the recovery of basic Christianity under the present leadership of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

And then... and then, John 20 then shows what resurrection looks like inside an anxious room. The disciples are **behind** locked doors for fear. They do not appear brave, steady, or ready. They look like frightened people whose world has collapsed. Then Jesus comes and stands among them and says, "**Peace be with you!**" (John 20:19). **Peace! God's peace be with you, just like it was with them...** This is one of the most important resurrection scenes in the New Testament

<sup>10</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library).

<sup>11</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Paul N. Anderson, "Primitive Christianity Revived—The Original Quaker Vision," *Quaker Religious Thought* 131 (2018). Anderson notes that early Friends sought the recovery of "Basic Christianity" or "Primitive Christianity Revived."

because it shows that resurrection is not merely a trivial event to be announced. It is **the presence of the living Christ entering fear**.

Jesus does not begin with a lecture. He gives himself; He shows them his wounds, the risen Lord is the crucified Lord. Easter does not erase Good Friday; it vindicates the One who passed through it. That is why peace here is so weighty. It is not shallow reassurance. It is peace purchased through obedience, suffering, death, and **VICTORY**.

You know, well, if you think you know, know this: God's deepest gift is not simply answers, but God's own presence. The world is changed, not first by explanation, but by encounter with the living Christ.<sup>13</sup>

### TAKEAWAY POINT #1

The disciples are not healed by mastering their circumstances. They are re-centered by the presence of Jesus. He stands in the middle of them, and their fear begins to lose its rule. He breathes on them, sends them, and turns a locked room into the birthplace of a mission. Jesus becomes truly the **Divine Center**.

Thomas's role in the passage deepens the scene even further. He is often remembered as a doubter, but the text is kinder than that. Thomas is not asking for novelty. He wants to know whether the crucified Jesus is truly the risen Jesus. He refuses secondhand certainty. And when Jesus meets him, he does not shame him; he invites him. Thomas answers, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28, NIV). Honest struggle is not the enemy of faith. Hidden pride is a greater danger. Thomas's guardedness becomes worship when the risen Christ meets him in truth. That is truly the **Great Confession**...

Y'all know that in a fearful system, anxiety spreads quickly. People hide, overreact, fuse, or shut down. But Jesus enters the room as a steady, present, non-anxious center. Edwin Friedman argued that genuine leadership often works more through presence than through forcefulness. That is exactly what Jesus does here. He does not absorb the panic of the room, and he does not abandon the room to its panic. He remains calm, connected, truthful, and clear. Resurrection life is not only a doctrine to affirm. It is the power by which fearful communities can be reordered around Christ instead of around anxiety.<sup>14</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1 carries the same resurrection reality into the longer road of suffering. Peter writes to believers who are scattered and tested. He does not deny their grief. He names it. But he also places it within a larger reality: "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope

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<sup>13</sup> Paul N. Anderson, "A Theology of Presence," *Evangelical Friend* 26, no. 6 (July/August 1993). Anderson argues that God's deepest gift is God's own presence and that blessing flows from a relationship with the living God.

<sup>14</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*; summarized in Alastair J. Roberts, *Self and Leadership* (2016).

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3, NIV). Hope lives because Jesus lives. Christian hope is not optimism, denial, or vague positivity. It is hope rooted in a living Person who has passed through death and come out the other side alive.

That means suffering is real, but it is not final. Trials are real, but they are not proof of God’s absence. Tears are real, but they do not mean the church has been abandoned. This is where holiness becomes very practical. Holiness is not floating above pain. Holiness is what God grows in his people as they remain faithful in pain. Holiness is not private glow or inward sentiment alone, but embodied obedience, visible love, and a community formed in the character of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

This is also where the Keswick concern for practical holiness fits in a useful way. Holiness is not bare moral effort, nor is it optional decoration added after salvation. It is the life the risen Christ forms in his people. In these readings, **holiness does not compete with grace; it flows from grace – holiness comes from the flow of Grace...** The risen Jesus gathers a people to live in his peace, stand in his living hope, and bear his risen life in a fearful world.<sup>16</sup>

When all four readings are held together, the shared movement becomes clear. Psalm 16 gives the promise. Acts 2 proclaims the fulfillment. John 20 reveals resurrection presence. First Peter interprets resurrection life for a suffering church. Or, more simply: promise, fulfillment, presence, and participation.

That is why context matters so much. Without context, we may preach comfort without lordship, experience without fulfillment, suffering without hope, or holiness without grace. But with the whole picture in view, the message becomes clearer and richer. The Holy One promised in Israel’s Scriptures has been raised in Jesus Christ, and through his resurrection God now gathers a people who live by his presence, bear witness in truth, endure suffering with living hope, and are being made holy together.

This is not extra religious polish added onto Easter. It is Easter’s fruit. In Psalm 16, holiness appears as life in God’s presence. In Acts 2, holiness appears as the apostolic proclamation that Jesus is risen and Lord. In John 20, holiness appears as peace replacing fear, truth replacing concealment, and mission replacing paralysis. In 1 Peter 1, holiness appears as tested faith, durable joy, and obedience under pressure. The headwaters are Jesus revealed; the downstream is Jesus reproduced.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Carole Dale Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> David D. Bundy, *Keswick: A Bibliographic Introduction to the Higher Life Movements* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits Press, 2012; orig. 1975). Bundy describes Keswick’s aim as “the promotion of practical holiness.”

<sup>17</sup> This concluding “headwaters/downstream” reflects the theological phrasing and language of Rev. Dr. Bravard’s holiness dissertation.

So, the golden thread is this: the God of Israel promised that death would not have the final word over his Holy One, fulfilled that promise by raising Jesus from the dead, and now forms a holy, hope-filled people through the living presence of the risen Christ. The gospel of God is that Jesus Christ is risen, and because he lives, his people need not remain locked in fear, trapped in grief, or fragmented by anxiety. They are invited into the life of God, the peace of Christ, and the holy courage of a resurrection-shaped people.

## CONCLUSION

Everybody will be resurrected. Some to the resurrection of life, some to the resurrection of damnation. But everybody will be resurrected. When a man dies without Jesus Christ, his soul and spirit go into the abode of the wicked, into hell where God is not. And that happens at the moment that he dies.

For a believer whose faith is in Jesus Christ, the moment a person dies, their soul, the spirit, goes into the presence of Jesus Christ. “Absent from the body,” said Paul, “present with the Lord.” “I long,” said Paul, “to be not here but there with Christ.” Philippians 1.

So, when one dies, immediately the soul of that person either goes **OUT** of the presence of God or **INTO** the presence of God. What we are talking about in resurrection is a body that God raises from the dead to join that immortal soul.

There will be a bodily resurrection, both of believers in a new kind of body, to meet the soul that has already gone on to its destiny: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15...