

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in his word I hope. Psalm 130

The bible is a book about hope. Perhaps masked in the O.T., abundantly clear in the N.T.

It's about looking to the future in confidence, and with that sure confidence making the most of the present moment, redeeming the time – doing so in joyful expectation.

It all has to do with Jesus, who on the cross carried our sins, and has risen to be the first of many brothers and sisters – the “first fruit” of the new creation.

I found this hope in the heart of a little three year old. The morning we heard that my father had died we wondered how to break this news to our youngest. He'd got on so well with his granddad. At granddad's request he, granddad, was always known by his Christian name, Jim. We were knocked over by young Keith's response to the sad news. It was this - “Won't Jesus be pleased”. Then a pause, and, very likely in response to our puzzlement he added – he'll enjoy Jim's jokes.” Hope. Faith.

“Unless you become like a little child...”

The African slaves working in the Southern States were sustained by that hope. They trusted in the God who would never let them go. Who would be there for them in the end.

Listen to this poem by James Weldon Johnson – it says it all. Entitled, A Funeral Sermon

“Weep not, weep not, she is not dead; She's resting in the bosom of Jesus... (Scan/read poem here).....

The Christian hope is that in death we will be translated into the loving care of Jesus. That's what it says and that is enough.

John 14. “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you will be also.

In my Father's house are many rooms I go to prepare a place for you.”

There is Jesus assurance to the thief on the cross.

“This day you will be with me in paradise.”

The African American's funeral sermon, and young Keith's confidence line up perfectly with this assurance – “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”

No hanging about, no anxiety, no more tears. The peace of the Lord Jesus. That's the hope we have been given. That is enough. More is speculation. If we are tempted to go beyond that we are into speculation, making an image of our own dreams – maybe idols – drawing heaven to our own specification.

Paul in 1 Cor.15 declares that the foundation of our hope for the future lies in the resurrection of Christ –

1Cor.15:20 But In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died...for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ."

He says it is like planting a seed. Our human body is a seed. When planted in the ground it changes – in order to fulfil its potential. It will be changed. Die as a seed. Transformed into a useful plant. Intimately related to the seed, but different. So very much grander.

The hope which inspired the apostles and the early church was so much broader than personal survival – even if that meant being with Christ – resting in Christ.

They'd come to believe that God was going to restore the whole of creation. The Risen Lord Jesus was a sample of that restoration.

They, and we, have Ezekiel's vision where he sees the valley of dry bones – the broken down, side-tracked people of God, coming to restored life.

John on Patmos was to write of a new city needing no light of the sun because it would be filled with the light of the glory of God.

A place where there would be no more tears, no more partings. Where the love of God is all in all.

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God...

the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Romans 8:18

How vast. Restoration. Total.

Paul and the others speak in very concrete terms of the new world – of heaven and earth, two dimensions of God's creation becoming one – when the Kingdom has come in all its fullness.

It hasn't happened yet. **But it is going to!**

As Christians we are confidently waiting for a future given by God.

Hope is God's gift. Hallelujah.

The world outside the church thinks we are talking about a heaven that is off in the clouds – with shadowy figures flitting about and angels playing harps. Perhaps we have sometimes been influenced by this caricature.

As Believers our hope is not self-induced.

The biblical picture is affirmed in the Apostles Creed– “I (we) believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

God's done it in Jesus. He'll do it again.

New creation. Creation restored. Here!

A bit hard to picture? Of course it is. But that is the apostles' vision. It's what drove them. That the Lord Jesus who on the third day after his death **greeted Mary outside the tomb.** A Lord who entered the locked room where the frightened, distraught eleven were sheltering – and **singled out doubting Thomas**, inviting him to see and touch the wound in his side, the nail marks on hands and feet. The Lord is risen and we will be raised with him.

Were the disciples

waiting? Hoping? Up to that point, not really. It was way beyond their imagining. A great surprise. Too massive for their minds. Death had been conquered! There **is** life after death. God will one day complete his purpose of restoring creation. The failure of humanity demonstrated in Adam, and everyone since, has been overcome, superseded, gone forever.

“In Christ all have been made alive.”

That's the good news. Heaven and earth will become one. The Risen Lord the first fruits. He is the first of who we will become. Yes, still showing signs of where we have been (the marks of the nails) but not limited by the past – Knowing - “the glorious freedom of the children of God”.

Thomas didn't place his hand where the nails had pierced – being in the Lord's presence was enough. More than enough.

Overwhelmed by forgiveness, the love that had taken his Lord to the cross, that his Lord had poured out on him personally, so he could only gasp – “My Lord, and my God!” Thomas found a new kind of knowing.

The biblical promises give assurance that we will be with Jesus when we die.
 The childlike understanding of our three year old. The same understanding of the African-American funeral sermon.

The text from my friend's daughter – "thanks, I think it could only be a few days now before Dad goes home to the Lord." (It was a few hours.)

The assurance given to the thief on the cross next to Jesus. –

Echoed so clearly by Paul in 2 Cor.4:14

"Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence."

Wonderful.

And a magnificent future that God has - creation restored.

A picture of heaven coming to earth.

That's what the promises are about - Human language is totally inadequate to describe this new creation.

The words are, as it were, a set of sign-posts. No more. If we go beyond into specific detail we have moved into speculation. The NT does not give detail – faith – Heb. 11:1

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"

Where a little child shall lead them

Where the earth will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea

Where there shall be no more tears and no more partings

That new heaven and new earth are going to be established at a time the bible refers to as **"the Last Day"**. **And it is going to be established right here** – not out there, in space. This here is the world God created. This is the world that rebelled and suffered. And this is the world that -

"God so loved that he gave his own Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

I find helpful the way Anglican bishop and theologian, N.T.Wright, puts it.

He talks about our being with Christ when we pass on – describes it as–
LIFE AFTER DEATH A time where Believers are resting in blessed communion with Christ.

**AND THEN- in God's good time we shall enter into -
 LIFE AFTER, LIFE- AFTER- DEATH**

For in God's appointed time, there will be - That Last Day, The Day of Resurrection.

Paul - writing to Timothy – 2 Tim.1: 10

"Our Saviour Christ Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel..."

I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him."

Our future is not, is not, slow decline, limitation and then dead-end, with tears all round. Because that same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us.

In closing I want to read from Revelation 21 -

The hope given us to hold fast AND to share with anyone who will listen.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, See the home of God is among mortals, He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.." Rev.21:3-4

Our Christian hope does not rest on an idea. It rests on the living person of Jesus Christ, the One who's risen from the dead.

"We have a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."
 1 Peter 1:3,4

I invite you to affirm with me the faith we share by standing and repeating the Apostles Creed. Saying it together with enthusiasm. Volume.

It has sometimes been called the Church's battle cry.

Apostles Creed

