

*A Living Hope*  
**1 Peter 1:1-12**  
John Breon

A man and a woman had been married for more than 60 years. They shared everything and had no secrets from each other except the little old woman had a shoebox at the top of her closet that she cautioned her husband never to open, never to ask her about. For all those years he had never thought about the box, but one day the little old woman got very sick and the doctor said she would not recover. In order to sort out their affairs, the little old man took down the shoebox and took it to his wife's bedside. She agreed it was time he should know what was in the box. When he opened it, he found two crocheted dolls and a stack of money totaling \$95,000. He asked her about the contents. She said, "When we were to be married, my grandmother told me the secret of a happy marriage was never to argue. She told me that if I ever got angry with you I should just keep quiet and crochet a doll." The little old man was moved to tears. Only two little dolls in that box. Only two little interruptions in 60 years of living and loving and marriage. He grew even more in love with this woman than he had ever been before. He said, "Honey, that moves me deeply. That explains the dolls, but what about all this money? Where did *it* come from?" "Oh that," she said. "Every time I crocheted a doll, I sold it at a craft fair for \$5."

Life can hand us some stunning reversals. Sometimes the rug gets pulled out from under us. And sometimes there's a steady accumulation of resentments. We wish life could be better. We want the world to be better. We become dissatisfied with the way things are, both in the world and in ourselves.

Everyone at some point feels that things are not as they should be. "The world is marked by death, violence, suffering, and injustice, and lives by tragedy, hurt, and pain. There is also the vague but real unease that we are not as we should be. Even though our visions of a perfect world or a moral person may be flawed, we nonetheless have them" (Hal Knight, "A

Theology of Hope," *Catalyst* <http://www.catalystresources.org/a-theology-of-hope/>).

Is there room for hope in a world like this? What threatens us and tempts us to lose hope and give up? Peter is writing to a group of churches scattered across a region of the Roman Empire. He knows the people in those Christian communities are suffering persecution for their faith. Peter is probably in Rome as he sends this letter. Nero will soon begin his persecution of Christians there. The believers, the Jesus followers Peter writes to need hope to sustain them and give them courage to endure. Because the Holy Spirit is at work, because Jesus is alive, because God has a purpose and is not done with us yet, hope is available.

I like the story about a man who approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing—we're behind."

"Boy," said the spectator, "I'll bet you're discouraged."

"Why should I be discouraged?" replied the little boy. "We haven't even batted yet!" (<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/hope.htm>)

We are not done. God is not finished. There is hope. God is the source of this hope. Peter praises or blesses "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" because God "has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead."

The resurrection of Jesus doesn't just mean that Jesus' story has a happy ending. It also affects us. It changes our lives now and it changes our future. What kind of difference does hope make?

Eugene Land was someone who greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Land, a self-made millionaire, had been asked to speak to a class of sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? He wondered how he could even get them to look at him. Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak from his heart. "Stay in school," he urged them, "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of those students changed. For the first time they had hope. One student said, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high

school. (*Parade Magazine*, cited at <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/hope.htm>).

*The basis of our hope is the resurrection of Jesus.* Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we have confidence in God's faithful mercy and power.

*The content of our hope is the inheritance God has for us.* God promised Abraham an inheritance—a land to call his own. Later Jewish teaching, as well as the New Testament, sees this inheritance not so much as physical land, but as what God would give people at the final day when God's kingdom comes in all its fullness. We have this inheritance in Christ. We have promise in him. We have the life of God's new creation in us now and we will have it fully in the new heavens and new earth. This inheritance can never perish, spoil or fade. It's eternal.

*The promise of our hope is salvation.* Salvation is deliverance from sin and death. It includes forgiveness and new birth, pardon for sin and transformation of who we are. Peter talks about salvation being fully revealed in the future. According to the NT, we speak of salvation in past tense—"I have been saved"; as the present continuing deliverance or disentanglement from the clutches of sin—"I am being saved"; and as the future final deliverance when Christ is revealed—"I will be saved" (Peter Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT).

As God's people in Christ, people who have been born anew to a living hope, we have something to look forward to in this life and beyond. Having that hope changes who we are and how we live. John Wesley taught the earliest Methodists that God is always calling us to grow, always has something new for us. God continues to work on us.

Wesley's Methodists soon began to extend this optimism of grace beyond personal salvation to the physical needs of others. Love of neighbor led to a wide range of ministries to meet the needs of the impoverished, sick, and suffering. In both England and America, Wesleyans continued this work in the nineteenth century, extending it to efforts at social reform, including the elimination of slavery, altering conditions that produced poverty, and equality for women.

There was hope that God could transform society in this age such that it more closely resembled that of the age to come. Wesley believed that, in the end, there would be a new heaven and a new earth, superior to the original, in which the love revealed in Jesus Christ would govern and infuse all things. That ultimate hope was coupled with a present hope: even now, the Holy Spirit is at work, bringing the reality of that new creation to birth in hearts and lives, and in the world at large. (Knight)

God is not finished. God still has a work to do. God still has work for us to do. As people of hope, we keep going on with the Lord who leads us and empowers us.

I heard a new version of a story I'd first heard years ago. In an art museum, there was a painting that showed a chess game. One character looked like a man; the other character looked a lot like the Devil. The man is down to his last piece on the chessboard. He has a panicked look on his face. The devil smiles in triumph. The title of the painting is *Checkmate*. One day, an international chess champion was touring the museum and saw the painting. He stood in front of it for a long time, studying it. Finally, he nearly shouted, "It's a lie! The king still has one more move!" This is good news. This is why we have hope.

*The King still has one more move.*

A little boy named David is up against the giant named Goliath. David's in trouble. He tries to put on King Saul's armor, but Saul's a 52-Long, and David's a 36-Short. He can't even handle a grown-up's sword. It looks like Checkmate, but...

*The King still has one more move.*

A man named Daniel gets thrown into a den of lions, because he refuses to stop praying to God. The lions are hungry. He's in there all night. At the first light of dawn, Darius calls down. Daniel tells him that the lions have been put on a "Low Protein Diet," and he's fine, because...

*The King still has one more move.*

A man named Moses convinces a nation of oppressed slaves to run away from the most powerful man on earth. Pharaoh sets out after them. They're standing on the shore with the Red Sea in front of them and the greatest army in the world behind them, and the people say to Moses, "Moses, what were you thinking?" And Moses says to God, "God, what were You thinking?" But...

*The King still has one more move!*

This is Easter Hope. ...On Good Friday, they tried Jesus and judged Him; they whipped Him and beat Him; they mocked Him and scorned Him; they hung Him on a cross to die and laid Him low in a tomb to rot the way every human body has rotted ever since death entered this sorry, dark world. And then they said to everybody, "That's all, folks. Show's over. Time to go home. Checkmate."

But they were wrong, because...

*The King still had one more move!*

[What challenge do you face?] Maybe there is stress at work. Maybe you're in a marriage that is falling apart, or that has already fallen. Maybe there is a son or daughter, somebody that you love, who is struggling or estranged from you. Maybe you have financial pressures. Maybe you have done the wrong thing, or said the wrong thing, or made a mistake that feels so big it could never be redeemed. Maybe not. Maybe things are going pretty well, and there is no crisis at all. But there will be one day. The mortality rate is still hovering right around 100%. Whatever you face, whether it's today or tomorrow, the promise of Jesus to everyone who puts their trust in Him in this, there is hope, even when it feels like "Checkmate." ...

*The King still has one more move.* (John Ortberg

[http://www.mppc.org/sites/default/files/transcripts/050327\\_jortberg\\_t.pdf](http://www.mppc.org/sites/default/files/transcripts/050327_jortberg_t.pdf), accessed 4/29/14)

Come to the table and see the King make another move in your life. Receive new birth into a living hope. Receive mercy, grace, love. Rejoice in the salvation you have through faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.