

Our Identity and Hope in Jesus

1 Peter 1:1-12

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Today is an exciting day because we begin a brand-new sermon series through the letter of 1 Peter. This is following the Bible study that many of you will also be using in your home groups over the coming weeks.

My hope, and my prayer, is exactly the same, as I wrote in the introduction to the study: that as we journey through Peter's letter together, we will grow deeper in faith and discover what it truly means to live with the living hope that Jesus gives us.

But before we dive into Peter's words, I'd like to begin somewhere else.

Last week I had the privilege of spending a week in Taizé. For those who have never been, Taizé is unlike anywhere else. Everyday thousands of young people, 2700 last week, from across the world gather to pray, sing, worship, eat together and simply seek God.

There is a beautiful simplicity about life there. Three times a day, the church fills with silence, Scripture and song.

- There are no flashing lights.
- No performances.
- No pressure.
- Just space for God.

Every year, Brother Matthew, the Prior of the Taizé Community, writes a letter that centres the community and its teaching. This year, Brother Matthew focuses on one question from John's Gospel.

When Jesus first encounters two disciples, He doesn't begin with a lecture. He doesn't begin by telling them what they should believe.

He simply asks:

John 1:38

38"What are you looking for?"

That question echoed through the whole week: **What are you seeking? What are you looking for?**

- Silence?
- Peace?
- Purpose?
- Healing?
- Forgiveness?
- Hope?
- Belonging?
- Success?
- Control?

Because the answer to that question shapes the direction of your whole life.

And I wonder if Jesus stood here this morning and looked each one of us in the eye and asked us that question, what would our answer be?

So, it feels fitting that this question leads us into the letter of Peter. Peter knew exactly what it meant to seek Jesus. He was there. He heard that question. He left his fishing nets because he was seeking something greater.

Yet Peter also knew failure. He promised loyalty, then denied Jesus three times. He knew shame, disappointment, and he knew what it felt like to wonder if everything had been lost.

Yet Peter also knew restoration. The risen Jesus sought him out; cooked breakfast on a beach; asked three times, "Do you love me?" And then entrusted him again with God's people.

That is why Peter's words carry such weight. He isn't writing a theory - he's writing a testimony.

He knows what it is to discover that your identity isn't found in your failures. It's found in Jesus.

One of the beautiful things about this opening chapter is that Peter doesn't begin by telling Christians what they must do. He begins by reminding them who they are.

Listen again to those opening verses.

1 Peter 1:1-2

¹ 'To God's elect...² chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.'

Notice what comes first. Not behaviour, but identity.

Before Peter tells believers how to live, he reminds them who they belong to.

That matters enormously, because we live in a culture that constantly asks, "Who are you?"

And then tells us to answer with our achievements.

- Our careers.
- Our relationships.
- Our failures.
- Our politics.
- Our appearance.
- Our possessions.
- Even our mistakes.

We build identities on things that can disappear overnight.

- Lose the job - who am I?
- Children leave home - who am I now?
- Retire - who am I?
- Become ill - who am I?
- Make a terrible mistake - who am I?

Peter says "No."

If you belong to Jesus, your identity begins somewhere much deeper. You are chosen; loved; known; called; secure in Christ. That isn't something you earn. It's something you receive.

As the Bible study reminds us of this week, Christians are chosen, loved and secure in God.

Then Peter gives us such a wonderful phrase that hits deep in the heart and makes us burst.

³"He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Not wishful thinking. Not optimism. Not crossing our fingers. Living hope.

And why living? Because Jesus is alive!

Every other hope eventually dies.

- Money fades.
- Health fades.
- Relationships change.
- Dreams alter.
- Even life itself comes to an end.

But our hope is rooted in someone who walked out of the tomb.

That changes everything. because if Jesus defeated death, then nothing is beyond His redemption.

This is where Jesus' question in Brother Matthew's letter meets Peter's words.

What are you seeking? What are you looking for?

Many people spend their lives seeking happiness. Others seek success; recognition; security; comfort.

But Peter gently redirects us. Don't seek *something*. Seek *Someone*.

Because when we find Jesus...

- We discover hope that suffering cannot destroy.
- Peace that circumstances cannot steal.
- An identity that failure cannot erase.
- A future that death cannot cancel.

The greatest discovery in Taizé wasn't found in any sermon. There wasn't any! It was found in the silence. Thousands of young people sitting quietly before God. No phones. No distractions. Just asking, "Lord... what am I really seeking?"

Maybe that is the invitation for us today. Not simply to study Peter. But to allow Jesus to ask us the same question.

Peter writes to Christians scattered across Asia Minor who were living as outsiders, facing misunderstanding and increasing hostility because of their faith. He doesn't pretend life is easy. He doesn't promise that following Jesus removes suffering. Instead, he says something remarkable. Trials refine faith. Like gold refined in fire. No one enjoys the fire. But the fire reveals what is genuine.

Many of us know something about that.

- Some of us carry grief.
- Some uncertainty.
- Some illness.
- Some disappointment.
- Some hidden battles.

Peter doesn't minimise any of that. Instead, he says 'Your suffering does not define you. Jesus does. Your circumstances do not write the final chapter. The resurrection does.

As many of you know, this season has involved a great deal of prayer and discernment for me. Accepting God's call to Holy Trinity hasn't simply been about accepting a new job; it has been about trusting the One who calls. If you'd asked me three years ago, at the beginning of my curacy, where I thought I'd end up, I couldn't have told you. And if I'm honest, even now I don't know exactly what the future will look like.

But Peter reminds me that my identity isn't "Curate of All Saints" or "Senior Associate Minister." Those are roles and they may change.

The truth that never changes is this:

- I am a child of God.
- Chosen.
- Loved.
- Given a living hope.

That identity goes with me wherever Jesus leads.

And that's true for every one of us.

Most of you may not be changing churches, I hope! But you may be facing a new chapter in life.

- Retirement.
- A diagnosis.
- Bereavement.
- A new job.
- Children leaving home.
- An uncertain future.

Peter reminds us that our hope isn't found in the chapter we're in. It's found in the Author of our story.

Over the next five weeks, Peter will take us on a journey.

We'll discover what it means to:

- Know our identity in Christ.
- Become more like Jesus.
- Live as God's people in the world.
- Respond to suffering with faith.
- Stand firm together.

But everything begins here: Identity – Hope – Jesus. Before Peter tells us how to live, he reminds us of who we are.

So let me finish where Jesus began.

He asks, "What are you seeking?" and then responds, "Come and see"

So, what are you seeking?

- If you're seeking certainty...Come to Jesus.
- If you're seeking forgiveness...Come to Jesus.
- If you're seeking purpose...Come to Jesus.
- If you're seeking hope...Come to Jesus.

Because the wonderful truth Peter proclaims is that our hope is not built on how strong we are. It is built on how faithful Jesus is.

- He is alive.
- He is present.
- He is calling us into a relationship with Him, to find our true identity that is found in Him.

And perhaps today, just as He did on the shores of Galilee two thousand years ago, He asks each one of us,

"What are you seeking?"

May our answer simply be, **"Lord... we're seeking You."** Because when we find Him, we discover that all along, He has been seeking us.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, you still ask us today, "*What are you seeking?*" Search our hearts and help us to answer honestly. Where we have sought security in the wrong places, turn our eyes back to You.

Thank You that in Your great mercy You have given us new birth into a living hope through Your resurrection. Remind us that our identity is not found in our achievements or our failures, but in being loved, chosen, and called by You.

As we begin this journey through 1 Peter together, shape us into people who stand firm in faith, live with hope, and reflect Your love to a world that is searching. May everything we do and everything we become point others to you, Jesus, our living hope. Amen



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