

# Tom Wright: Surprised by Hope

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Notes by Alison Morgan October 2015



## I. Setting the Scene

### 1. All dressed up and no place to go?

1997 saw an outburst of public grief for Princess Diana; and *football coach* Glen Hoddle sacked for making heretical statements about the afterlife. And in 2001 we had 9/11. Two questions arise: what is the ultimate Christian hope? And, what hope is there for new possibilities within the world in the present? These have to be taken together – Christian salvation is not simply away from this world, for the Christian hope is for God's new creation, and is to be located ultimately within this world. It's not just a matter of sorting out what to believe when someone has died – from Plato to Hegel, some of the greatest philosophers have declared that what you think about death, and life beyond it, is the key to thinking seriously about everything else.

Religions vary enormously in what they teach about life after death; and any visit to a graveyard or cursory study of poetry reveals that people in our own historically Christian culture do too. We have a culture of silence about death – perhaps in the C20th there was simply too much of it to cope with. Today there seems to be a variety of belief – annihilation, reincarnation (of some sort), and some sort of low-grade nature religion with elements of Buddhism.

### 2. Puzzled about paradise?

Two perspectives. Canon Henry Scott Holland of St Paul's, preaching in 1910 on the death of Edward VII, is often quoted – 'death is nothing at all. It does not count. I have only slipped away into the next room'. That, he says, is how we want to feel. The reality, he goes on, is rather different: death is 'so inexplicable, so ruthless, so blundering... the cruel ambush into which we are snared... it makes its horrible breach in our gladness with careless and inhuman disregard of us... beyond the darkness hides its impenetrable secret... Dumb as the night, that terrifying silence!' How do we respond to these two poles? Death, Holland suggests, happens when we give our lives to Christ; our journey continues beyond the grave.

Wright - every death is a real and savage break, a horrible denial of the goodness of human life; and that needs to be part of our response. John Donne is helpful ('Death be not proud') – death is an enemy but, for a Christian, a beaten enemy. Popular Christian belief supposes the existence of a place we go to called heaven – fluffy clouds, etc. Actually there is little in the Bible about 'going to heaven when you die', and not much about a hell either. The 'kingdom of heaven' in Matthew refers to God's sovereign rule coming 'on earth as it is in heaven'; the pictures in Revelation 4&5 refer not to the last day but to present reality. 'Heaven, in the Bible, is... not a future destiny, but the other, hidden dimension of our ordinary life.' God made heaven and earth; one day he will remake both, and join them together for ever.

The middle appears in our hymns and songs, and even in the liturgy, where Advent, Christmas, Lent, Good Friday have assumed a higher profile than Easter – which is the whole point. Even the funeral liturgy fails to talk much about the resurrection of the body. And it was that which kept the early Christians going, not a belief in some spiritualised survival.

### 3. Early Christian hope in its historical setting

The key claim is the resurrection of Jesus. The accounts may diverge - current example would be the debate between Wittgenstein and Popper in Cambridge (did W threaten P with a poker, or did he not?). But something must underlie them.

The ancient pagan world did not believe in resurrection. The word was never used to refer to life after death, but only to a belief in bodily death followed by bodily new life. *Resurrection meant bodies*. Jesus talked in reasonably traditional Jewish terms about the resurrection of the righteous, but then suggested it would happen to him first. Belief in resurrection is Jewish – but it underwent 7 modifications in early Christian times. They held a firm two-step belief: firstly, death and whatever lies immediately beyond (when Jesus talks about many rooms in his father's house the word refers to a temporary dwelling place), secondly a new bodily existence in a newly remade world. And instead of lurching back to the traditional, they developed it:

1. Within early Christianity there is no spectrum of belief about life after death – coming from many different cultures, they all held to a belief in bodily resurrection.
2. Resurrection moved from the periphery to the centre – Paul and John build everything on it. Take away Christmas and you lose 2 chapters of Matt and 2 of Luke. Take away resurrection and you lose the entire NT and most of the C2 Fathers as well.
3. Resurrection means not just a body, but a new, transformed and incorruptible body. 1 Cor 15.
4. Resurrection is now split into two: Jesus first, everyone else at the end of history.

5. As the resurrection had begun with Jesus, we are called to work with him, in the power of the Spirit, to implement his achievement and anticipate the final resurrection, in personal and political life, in mission and holiness. We are charged with transforming the present.
6. Resurrection acquired an additional metaphorical meaning; dying and rising with Christ.
7. The resurrection of Jesus was held to prove the Messiahship of Jesus.

So – resurrection is not the redescription of death but its overthrow.

#### 4. The Strange story of Easter

The gospel accounts have 4 strange features which suggest they are indeed very early (pre-Pauline) accounts:

1. No scriptural references. It's insisted that Jesus's death was 'according to the scriptures' – but his resurrection goes beyond those. This suggests they were composed before there had been time for biblical reflection.
2. Women are the principal witnesses. Nobody would have made this up.
3. The portrait of Jesus – he doesn't shine, he isn't recognisable.
4. The gospel accounts do not mention the future Christian hope for the rest of us. It's facts only – Jesus is raised, Jesus is the Messiah, God's new world has begun, we have a job to do.

Each account picks up the themes of its own gospel, like painters painting the same person in their own style. So we must assume firstly that Jesus's tomb really was empty, secondly that the disciples really did encounter him in ways which convinced them he was not a ghost or a hallucination. They had language for that, and it wasn't resurrection. Jesus was buried according to a 2 stage tradition – body wrapped with linen and spices; bones later collected and stored in an ossuary. If he had not been raised, someone would have had to collect them. For the accounts to be accurate we need both the missing body and the encounters with a risen Jesus.

Wright examines the explanations often advanced as alternatives to the early Christian one, and dismisses them. Ending with the hypothesis that the disciples had some kind of 'spiritual' experience, he concludes: 'resurrection as and is the *defeat* of death, not simply a nicer *description* of it; and it's something that happens some while *after* the moment of death, not immediately.' 3. Additional points confirm the resurrection: the tomb did not become a shrine, the church changed the sabbath to Sunday; the disciples would not have been willing to die for something not located in fact. Was it unlikely – yes. But science studies the repeatable, history studies the unrepeatable. Historians aren't normally bothered by the fact that Caesar only crossed the Rubicon once, and if he'd done so a second time it'd have meant something different – it's all about how we know things. And we have no other explanations that can account for the empty tomb and the subsequent encounters. Hope, for a Christian, is not wishful thinking or blind optimism, but a mode of knowing, a mode within which new things are possible, options are not shut down, new creation can happen. And it's not an end but a beginning – John 21 shows us the questions that Thomas (faith) Peter (love), and Paul (hope, 1Cor15) were then faced with.. Historical arguments are strong – but they simply bring people to the core questions.

*The challenge is in fact the challenge of new creation. To put it at its most basic: the resurrection of Jesus offers itself, to the student of history or science no less than the Christian or the theologian, not as a very odd event within the world as it IS but as the utterly characteristic, prototypical and foundation event within the world as it has begun to be. It is not an absurd event within the old world, but the symbol and starting point of the new world. The claim advanced in Christianity is that magnitude: that with Jesus of Nazareth there is not simply a new religious possibility, not simply a new ethic or a new way of salvation, but a new creation.*<sup>78</sup>.

## II. God's Future Plan

### 5. Cosmic future – progress or despair?

There have been 2 ways of looking at the future, both confused with the Christian hope, neither coming anywhere near the NT.

1. The myth of progress – politicians still stick to this one, but the rest of us have moved on; they offer a relentlessly positive vision dressed in hype and spin – in the absence of real hope, all that's left is feelings. We don't believe them. This myth has its roots in the Enlightenment, it flowered in the Victorian age, but it's a parody of the Christian vision. Darwin and Marx were both products of their time, and their ideas were seized to serve the myth. The best known Christian exponent of it was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, with his vision of the presence of God in the natural world. The problem with the myth of progress is that it cannot deal with evil, either intellectually or practically.
2. Souls in transit. This is the Platonic ideal – the rejection not just of evil but of matter itself – the whole decaying world with its darkness and death. We are made for something quite different, a world of pure spiritual existence where we will be free of our material selves. This view wiggled its way into Christian thinking in the form of gnosticism; but most western Christians are still influenced by it. In this model, being a Christian is about going to heaven when you die.

The central Christian affirmation is neither of these – it is that what the creator God has done in Jesus, supremely in his resurrection, is what he intends to do for the whole world.

## 6. What the whole world's waiting for

The clearest statements of the Christian hope are found in the NT, in Paul and Revelation in particular. Three themes dominate: first, the goodness of creation. Second, the nature of evil – which does not consist in the fact that matter is transient, for the transience merely points to the larger purpose; it is found not in creation but in disobedience. Third, the plan of redemption. Images of seedtime and harvest abound, images of battle and victory, images of citizenship (and we are citizens who will live in a transformed world here, not somewhere else). Present physicality is to be transformed, not scrapped (Eph 1.19-20). Further, God intends to fill all creation with his own presence and love; Isaiah 11 says the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea'. How can the waters cover the sea – for they *are* the sea. So it will be. In Romans 8 Paul uses the image of birth pangs – what he has in mind is nothing less than the drastic and dramatic birth of new creation from the womb of the old. The present creation will stand to the new one as mother to child.

## 7. Jesus, heaven and new creation

The ascension is separate from the resurrection. Jesus was raised, then later ascended (bodily) into heaven. So he is there now – bodily. And yet heaven and earth are not 2 different locations within the same continuum of space/matter, but 2 different dimensions of God's creation. Two things follow: heaven relates to earth tangentially, so the one who is in heaven can be present simultaneously anywhere/everywhere on earth; and heaven is the control room for earth – all authority has been given to me. If we ignore the ascension, *the church expands to fill the vacuum*. Jesus, instead of being separate from his people and their Lord, becomes just present within them. Jesus has gone ahead of us into God's new world, and is both already ruling this one and interceding for us from that one. He's not kind of absorbed into Father and Spirit; he remains who he is.

What about the Second Coming? Americans tend to focus on it, everyone else to ignore it.

## 8. When he appears

During his earthly ministry, Jesus said nothing about his return. The master-coming-back parables are not about the second coming, but the first one- in fulfilment of the scriptures. The Greek word is *parousia*, which means 'presence' (as opposed to absence). At the time it referred to the mysterious presence of a divinity (esp when revealed in healing); or to a visit of a royal person to a subject state. When he uses *parousia* Paul is saying that Jesus is the reality of which Caesar is the parody. 1Thess4 is not a literal description of what Paul thinks will happen, but a different way of putting 1 Cor 15 and Phil 3. *All Christian language about the future is a set of signposts pointing into a mist*. 1Thess4 is not about a 'rapture', but about the way believers will greet their Lord and escort him *back* into his domain. Col 3 and 1 John 2.28&3.2 talk about Jesus appearing – not in some place within our own space-time world, but in his own world, God's world, heaven. 'This world is different from ours ('earth') but intersects with it in countless ways, not least in the inner lives of Christians themselves. One day the two worlds will be integrated completely, and be fully visible to one another, producing that transformation of which both Paul and John speak.'

## 9. Jesus the coming judge

We need to remember that God's coming judgement is a good thing; he will set the world right once and for all. In a world of injustice, violence, oppression, the thought that there might be a day when the wicked are put in their place and the weak given their due is the best news there can be. It's expressed most vividly in Daniel 7.

Justification by faith happens here, anticipating the verdict of the future day when God judges the world – it's God's advance declaration that when someone believes the gospel their sins are forgiven.

Consequences – we don't have either to build the kingdom by ourselves, or wait helplessly till Jesus comes again. We don't build it, but we build *for* it. All that we do will be enhanced and transformed at Jesus's appearing. There's an element of judgment in that (1Cor3.10-17) – the work we have each done will be disclosed.

'The ascension and appearing of Jesus constitute a radical challenge to the entire thought-structure of the Enlightenment'. *People who believe that Jesus is already Lord, and that he will appear again as judge of the world are called and equipped (to put it mildly) to think and act quite differently in the world from those who don't.*

## 10. The redemption of our bodies

There is widespread confusion among Christians (and therefore nonChristians) about what happens to people when they die. Romans 8.23 (redemption of our bodies) makes it quite clear that God's people are promised a new type of bodily existence, the fulfilment and redemption of our present bodily life.

Phil 3 – we are citizens of heaven, but that doesn't mean we will retire there when we finish here; Paul then says Jesus will come *from* heaven in order to transform the present humble body into a glorious body like his own. So Jesus is both the model for our future body and the means by which it comes about.

Col 3.1-4 – when the Messiah appears you too will appear with him. You don't go to be with him, you already possess life in him – the new life you possess (invisibly) will burst forth into full bodily reality

Rom 8.9-11. If the Spirit dwells in you, then the one who raised the Messiah will also raise you – physically.

'Many dwelling places' in John – the word refers not to a final resting place but a temporary halt on a journey that will take you somewhere else. Which fits with Luke, 'today you will be with me in paradise' – again, not a final destination, but a garden, a place of rest where the dead are refreshed as they await the dawn of a new day. Jesus is responding to the request to remember the man 'when you come in your kingdom' – no, Jesus says, sooner than that. Luke understood him to be referring to a state of being in paradise that would be prior to the resurrection – straight away, in fact.

So – *heaven is the place where God's purposes for the future are stored up.*

2 Cor 4-5 – a new tent awaits us. He's asking us to imagine a new mode of physicality which will stand in relation to our present body as our present body does to a ghost – far more real than our current body.

1 Cor 15 is the heart of the NT view of the resurrection. It echoes Gen 1-3; it is a theology of new creation. Translations which compare a 'physical body' to a 'spiritual body' are incorrect. The contrast is between the corruptible present body and the incorruptible future body, not between a physical one and a non-physical one. But the Gk adjectives used do not describe the material out of which things are made, but the power or energy which animates them – as in this is not a wooden ship, it's a sailing ship.

So we have a two-stage post-mortem future. Where will the resurrection take place - on the new earth, joined as it will be then to the new heaven. It will be a physical body, and we will be given it in order to rule over God's new world (not to lounge around playing harps). All the skills and talents which we have put to God's service this present life will be enhanced and given back to us to be exercised to his glory. It's all a reward – the kind of reward you get when you work at something, and your growing expertise brings benefits, like reading poetry in German because you have taken the trouble to learn German. The reward is organically connected to the activity.

## 11. Purgatory, paradise, hell

Potted and simplified history of Purgatory (Aquinas & Dante). 4 points:

1. Resurrection is in the future – all agree, and heaven isn't a good word for the ultimate goal of the redeemed. The ultimate destination is not going to heaven but being bodily raised into the transformed likeness of Christ. If we do want to speak of going to heaven when we die, we should be clear we are talking about the first of a two stage process
2. There is nothing in the NT to suggest any category distinctions between Christians now awaiting the resurrection in heaven. 1 Cor 3 does not indicate a difference of status; all Christians are to be thought of as saints
3. Purgatory is not a place, a time or a state. It was a late innovation, and RC theologians now question its theological foundations. Paul makes clear it's the *present* life that is meant to function as a purgatory.
4. All the Christian departed are in the same state: restful happiness. The body may 'sleep' but the real person continues; for it is far better now to be with Christ.

Over-literal interpretation produces atheists (believe in God on a cloud???) or universalists (a hell of torture can't be right). The lectionary deliberately omits bits about judgment – but we have had too many horrors which enlightened western thought can neither explain nor alleviate, and opinion now swings to the idea that there must be a judgement – it's the only way. Judgement is necessary – unless you believe nothing much is wrong, or God doesn't mind very much. Evil is there, and it comes from the primal fault (idolatry) and the consequent fault (subhuman behaviour). Sin is not the breaking of arbitrary rules; the rules are the thumbnail sketches of different types of dehumanizing behaviour. It seems that this idolatry and dehumanisation can become so endemic in an individual or group that those who persist are conniving at their own ultimate dehumanization. To such people God will eventually say, 'thy will be done.' Does that mean torment, a second chance to repent after death, or annihilation? Perhaps when human beings give their allegiance to something which is not God, they progressively cease to reflect the image of God, until they cease to be human beings at all?

The key questions are these: how will God's new creation come; and how will we contribute to that renewal of creation, and to the fresh projects which God will launch in his new world? Maybe we need to focus on how God is going to redeem

and renew his creation through human beings.

## III. Hope in practice – resurrection and the mission of the Church

### 11. Rethinking salvation: heaven, earth and the kingdom of God

The reason the resurrection matters is that because it happened within our own world, its implications and effects are to be felt within our own world too. It's not just one belief among many, it's a belief which is a symptom of an entire world view – an index to a way of looking at everything else. What you do in the present (painting, preaching, digging wells) will last into God's future. They aren't just ways of making the present life a little more bearable until the day when we leave it behind altogether; they are part of building for God's kingdom. The promise of new creation is not about life after death, it's about the mission of the church. We must avoid the old split thinking (evangelism = saving souls for eternity vs mission = working for justice in the present world). If we understand salvation as going to heaven when we die, the main work of the church is bound to be seen in terms of saving souls for that future. But if we understand salvation in terms of God's promised new heavens and earth, and our promised resurrection to share in that new embodied reality, then the main work of the church needs to be rethought. Salvation = being raised to life in God's new heaven and new earth – and the NT is full of suggestions that this starts here. Hence the connection between healing and salvation – we are saved as whole people, and the future rescue starts to come true in the present. And if it's about a whole new world, it can't just be for humans, but for all of creation – so we need to bear that in mind too. So: salvation is about whole human beings (not just souls), about the present (not just the future) and about what God does through us (not just in and for us).

### 13. Building for the kingdom

God builds God's kingdom – but through us; he has built into the gospel message the fact that through the work of Jesus and the power of the Spirit, he equips humans to help in the world of getting the project back on track. So everything we do will become, in due course, part of God's new world – every act of love, work of art, of care, of prayer will find its way, through the resurrection power of God, into the new creation which God will one day make. Nothing we do is wasted.

**Justice** – meaning the intention of God to set the whole world right. This doesn't mean we just wait till that happens; it doesn't mean the 'social gospel' either; it means living consciously between the resurrection of Jesus in the past and the making of God's new world in the future. God's new world has already broken into the present, and provides us with the energy we need for work for justice in the present. Doing it without that energy is to work with our hands tied behind our backs. Wright suggests that the major task now (as it was slavery 2 centuries ago) is the massive economic imbalance of the world, whose major symptom is the ridiculous and unpayable Third World debt.

**Beauty.** We are made in God's image, as creators; making things beautiful is part of the call to be stewards of creation.

**Evangelism.** We are engaging in the work of new creation, seeking to bring advance signs of God's new world into being in justice and beauty, then at the centre of the picture stands the personal call of the gospel of Jesus to every person. This is not about heaven vs hell and making sure people have grasped the heaven option; it's about announcing that Jesus is Lord, the powers of evil and death have been defeated, and God's new world has begun – about enabling people to become a living, breathing little bit of new creation.

The mission of the church must therefore reflect and be shaped by the future hope as the NT presents it. *The church, because it is the family that believes in hope for new creation, should stand out in every town and village as the place where new creativity bursts for the whole community, pointing to the hope which, like all beauty, always comes as a surprise.*

### 14. Reshaping the church for mission – biblical roots

This means the church must itself be renewed, resourced and reshaped for this mission. Mark doesn't say, Jesus is raised, there really is life after death; he says, Jesus is raised, you'd better go to Galilee and see him there. The resurrection means Jesus is now enthroned as Lord of heaven and earth. Emmaus road story (Lk 24) shows that the long story of Israel, the great scriptural narrative, has reached its goal and climax, and must now give birth to the worldwide mission in which nations are summoned to turn from idolatry and find forgiveness of sins – because in Jesus we see the true God in human form, the reality of which all idols are parodies, and the true forgiveness of sins through his cross, the reality before which all sacrifices are types and shadows. We are now commissioned, sent. And we are called to a new mode of knowing – a knowing in which we are involved as subjects, a knowing which is a form of love – an epistemology of love. [NB see Francis Spufford on this – AM].

Examples – Eastern European communism fell through the fearless witness of a Polish pope and those who took courage from his faith and hope. Apartheid – fell through a black African archbishop who spent the first 3 hours of every day in prayer.

Paul too sees the resurrection as the start of a new world, in which Jesus is already reigning as Lord. 1 Cor 15 – if Jesus is not raised, our faith is futile and we are still in our sins – he has achieved the victory, things change from now on in. The implications are in Romans 6 – the revolutionary new world which has begun in the resurrection of Jesus has its outposts in those who in baptism have shared his death and resurrection. See also Colossians 2 and 3 – if you are risen with Jesus, set your thoughts on the things that are above. Heaven and earth now interlock, and we are the points at which they do that. Spirit, sacrament and scriptures are given so that the double life of Jesus, heavenly and earthly, can become ours as well, already in the present. *The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you're now invited to belong to it.*

## 15. Reshaping the church for mission – living in the future

Celebrating Easter – which so often is just the one day happy ending tacked on to 40 days of fasting and gloom... We need to take a hard look at how we keep Easter!

**Space, time and matter** are meant to be renewed, not abandoned, within the life of the church – we must not chuck out the ancient trees to make room for a shopping centre and a car park; fresh expressions can become simply relentless popular-level Protestantism. The renewal of the world is anticipated in the claiming of space for worship and prayer. Church buildings are not a retreat from the world but a bridgehead into the world. So it is nothing short of dualistic folly to declare that old church buildings are irrelevant to the mission of God today. [NB Barna 2015 research, 27% of practising Christians cite going to church as a key factor in coming to faith; 1% cite getting involved in a fresh expression!!! – AM] Same goes for time, for church history and tradition – we must beware of idolatry, but jettisoning tradition merely because its tradition is to capitulate to post-modernity. Sunday has from the earliest times been kept as a sign of the breaking in of a new reality.

And matter – creation itself will be renewed; and the sacraments of baptism and eucharist make sense in that new, physical world. The bread and wine come to us as part of God's new creation. The sacraments are best understood within the theology of creation and new creation; they are not just the signs of the new reality, but somehow part of it. Every eucharist is a little Christmas as well as a little Easter.

**Mission** must recover from the split between saving souls and doing good in the world. Space, time and matter are where real people live; justice, beauty, evangelism all belong here, and the church is the people who set to work within all this.

**Prayer** – three ways of looking at this. 1 – a kind of nature mysticism, being open to the beauty, joy and power of the world around us. 2 – the making of petitions to a deity/deities who are distant. 3 – the prayer life of ancient Israel, which celebrates the goodness of creation and celebrates our reunion not with that creation itself, but with the creator God whose love and power are made known in it. In the NT the twin poles of nature mysticism and petitionary prayer are drawn together into a new configuration. In John 13-17 Jesus speaks of the new relationship which the disciples will have with the father as a result of his own going away. Heaven and earth come together in a new way future and present are joined in a new way, prayer and worship break out in a new way. The central Jewish prayer turns into the LP – they kingdom come, on earth as in heaven.

**Scripture** is designed to tell us about the work of new creation, but also to actually foster it, in churches, groups and individuals who read it and allow it to shape their lives.

**Holiness** – 1 Cor 5-6 and Romans 1. It's one thing to be lured into sin, another to change the moral compass and call evil good and good evil. Holiness is a matter of transformation, starting with the mind. Living out a life of Christian holiness makes sense, within God's new world, the world into which we are brought at baptism and nourished by the eucharist – we play our instrument, as part of an orchestra.

So Paul urges that *we should live in the present as people who are to be made complete in the future*. The sign of that completeness is love. 1 Cor 13. Forgiveness, Matt 18 – forgiving others as we have been forgiven. If you lock up the piano because you don't want to play to somebody else, how can God play to you? Not to forgive is to shut down a faculty in the innermost person, which happens to be the same faculty that can receive God's forgiveness – and it's also the faculty which can experience real joy and real grief.

*Of course, in our incomplete world, God's gentle offer and demand press upon us as fearful things, almost threatening. But God's offer and demand are neither fearful nor threatening. God in his gentle love longs to set us free from the prison we have stumbled into - the loveless prison where we refuse both the offer and the demand of forgiveness. We are like a frightened bird before him, shrinking away lest this demand crush us completely. But when we eventually yield - when he corners us, and finally takes us in his hand - we find to our astonishment that he is infinitely gentle, and that his only aim is to release us from our prison, to set us free to be the people he made us to be. But when we fly out into the sunshine, how can we not then offer the same gentle gift of freedom, of forgiveness, to those around us? That is the truth of the resurrection, turned into prayer, turned into forgiveness and remission of debts, turned into love. It is constantly surprising, constantly full of hope, constantly coming to us from God's future to shape us into the people through whom God can carry out his work in the world.*

### Two Easter sermons

Philippi – many were Roman citizens, but Rome didn't want them back when they retired; their job was to bring Roman culture to Philippi. Same with us – we have a job to do; to bring the life of heaven to birth and actual reality. We are to colonise earth with the life of heaven. Paul ends 1 Cor 15 with the injunction not to celebrate the great future life that awaits us, but to get on with our work, for it won't go to waste. The implications of Easter:

1. With Easter, God's new creation is launched upon a surprised world, pointing ahead to the renewal, redemption, rebirth of the entire creation
2. With Easter, every act of love, every deed done in Christ and by the Spirit, every work of creativity; every time justice is done, peace made, families healed, temptation resisted, freedom won – then the resurrection of Jesus is implemented and the final new creation is anticipated.