

What Hope Does It Give Us?

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[0 : 0 0] And we consider that Jesus' resurrection, perhaps as strange as it sounds, maybe to us, to the world around us, is the obvious and most reasonable explanation for the evidence that we have.

But tonight we're asking, so what? So what? Okay, even if that factual, historical conclusion that the resurrection is true and happened, we still need to know, don't we, if it works.

What does the resurrection do for us? What does it change? Why should it matter to people like me and you so far removed from it in time and space?

What does it matter that Jesus rose from the dead? Well, the Bible's answer to that question, as we'll see this evening, is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. Nothing is the same for those who put their hope in him.

And while there's loads of places in the Bible we could turn to explore that hope, I think possibly the thing we need to hear most on Easter Sunday, the year 2022, is this.

[1 : 0 7] Jesus' resurrection gives us a great and certain hope for the future. You don't have to look further, really, than your phone screen to see how desperate we are for a real, solid hope.

Wars, pandemics, scandals, divisions, death. These things cycle, don't they, before us through our news feeds every day, every week, every month, every year.

And then there are our own personal difficulties, the things that the world never gets to hear about. Our own tragedies, those of people who we love and we wonder, what hope do we have?

One of the phrases I've heard so often over the last few years is, at least it can't get any worse. Sometimes it has gotten worse. But we don't live in a very optimistic age, do we?

In fact, we saw people ask just there the question, what's the best future you could ever imagine? And people looked terribly awkward, didn't they? And confused.

[2 : 2 0] And the sorts of things that they spoke about were hardly the best of all possible worlds. A good job, a nice life, people being a little bit kinder or happier.

Or as one lady put it, you just hope that perhaps everything will be a little bit better. And you have to ask, is that the best? The best that we can imagine or hope for?

For our world? Those are not far-reaching or world-changing hopes, are they? They're small and vague hopes of people who have given up.

Hoping for anything solid or concrete or world-changing to happen. Anything great for the future. We live in a disappointed and weary world that doesn't know what to hope for other than for it please not to get any worse.

And so, is there anything better for us to consider this evening? Than that there is something solid and concrete and certain that we can hope in that guarantees to change our world for the better and for the best.

[3 : 33] Well, tonight we come to see that Jesus' resurrection gives us that sort of hope. What sort of hope does it give us? Well, tonight we're looking at the way that Paul, one of Jesus' first followers, unpacks the hope we have in chapter 15 of his first letter to the church in Corinth.

But he starts in a strange place. Here, let me put it like this. He says, well, if Christ hadn't been raised, what would we lose? What would we lose?

If Christ hadn't been raised, he says, we would lose everything. We would have nothing to hope for. Now, to set the scene here, Paul's setting out what's most important in the Christian faith.

He said loads of things in this letter. There's 14 chapters that have just passed. But he says, let me tell you what comes first. Christ died for our sins.

He was buried. He was raised from the dead on the third day. He appeared to Peter and the 12, then to 500 people, and then, very last of all, to me.

[4 : 37] See, this is what we pass on, he says, as gospel truth. We preached it, you believe it, and it will save you. But he's heard on the grapevine that some people in the church were denying that there is a resurrection.

And so, verse 12, he says, if it's preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

That's the sorts of things people would have been saying, things like, well, you know, when the Bible talks about resurrection, it's not talking about a real physical bodily resurrection.

It's more a metaphor for kind of spiritual new life, a resurrection in our hearts. But for Paul, these folks are pulling a thread that, if they keep pulling it, will unravel the whole of Christianity.

Because he says, our hope for the future and Christ's physical resurrection are bound together. If our bodies are not going to be raised from the dead, that must mean that Christ's body is still in the grave.

[5 : 53] And if Christ is still in the grave, he says, we don't have just a little bit less to hope for. We have nothing left to hope for. Hey, this is verse 14. Paul writes, if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith.

If Christ is not raised, we can all go home. I can stop here. Done. Now, that's the sort of thing perhaps you'd expect to hear from an out-and-out atheist, perhaps.

But at least, says Paul, atheists get how serious this is. If Christ isn't raised from the dead, there's nothing nice about going to church. There's nothing comforting about our faith.

There's nothing valuable left in Christianity. Because if it isn't true, then the whole thing is pointless. Perhaps it surprises you this evening that the Bible says that.

But the Bible is not full of vague ideas and nice thoughts. The Bible says our hope is either based on events that have taken place, or it is useless.

[7 : 07] Worse than that, though, says Paul, if Christ didn't rise from the dead, we're not right with God either. It's more important to Paul. More than that, we're found to be false witnesses about God.

Because we've testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But if he did not raise him, then in fact the dead are not raised. If Christ is not raised from the dead, he says, then we are guilty of lying about God.

Again, this is not something you'd expect a Christian, a Christian leader, to say, but Paul is open, isn't he, about saying, if Christ isn't risen, then this is not something that we can agree to disagree on.

Christianity is wrong. If Christ has not been raised, we are still deep in sin, he says. We're not right with God. So if that's the case, he says, then we have no hope whatsoever, no grounds for hope.

If the dead are not raised, then Christ hasn't been raised either. So any hope of life after death, our bodies healed, our world made new, as the women in the video put it, a world without sickness or pain or death or suffering anymore.

[8 : 23] All that is lost. Because, says Paul, if Christ is still in the grave, well, that is where it all ends for us too. And so his conclusion, this kind of alternative way of thinking is, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Pitied. He says, if we stake our hope in our lives, if we give everything to Christ, trusting that he is raised from the dead and he is not raised from the dead, well, people shouldn't respect us for that.

They should pity us. They should feel sorry for us. What hope does the resurrection give us? Well, what do we lose if it didn't happen?

And the apostle Paul says, we lose everything. No good news. No right relationship with God.

No forgiveness of our sins. No eternal life. No hope. Nothing. Which, I guess, is why many of the people that we saw in the video struggled when asked the question, what's the best future you could ever imagine?

[9 : 37] Because without Christ, without the resurrection, we have no real reason to hope for a better world. We have nothing to set our hope on.

But that means, of course, that if Jesus did rise from the dead, then we have every reason to hope for the best possible future we could ever imagine.

And so, to all our great relief, that is what Paul says next. With the resurrection, we have certain hope. Now, what do I mean by certain hope?

Normally, if we say things like, I hope the weather gets better, or I'm hoping for a holiday this year, the reason we have to hope is because it is not certain.

Okay, we don't know what the weather will do, and we don't know if we'll get away, so hoping is normally no different than wishing for something or grasping in the dark.

[10 : 40] But the hope that we have in Jesus isn't like that. It's Sinclair Ferguson, a pastor and writer, describes it in this way. He says, imagine the week before Christmas, a child pokes his head out the window of his bedroom, and he sees his dad wheeling a shiny, brand new, child-sized bike into the garage.

And so the next day, his granny asks him, what are you hoping for for Christmas? And with a big grin on his face, he says, I'm hoping for a new bike.

It's hope because he's still waiting for the present to be delivered. It's still in the future. But it's certain hope because he's seen what he's getting already.

And so another word for it would be expectation or anticipation because he knows it's coming. It's just not here yet. And that is what Christian hope is.

We have seen what is going to happen already, even though we are still waiting for it to be delivered to us. That is what Paul is describing there in verse 20.

[11 : 55] He says, but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Christ has been raised from the dead to show us what we are waiting and hoping for in the future.

His resurrection, says Paul, is like the first golden, juicy apple that you pluck from the orchard. It's the first glorious sip of wine from the vineyard.

The rest of the fruit is still hanging on the tree, hanging on the vine, waiting to be harvested. But the point is that first taste tells us exactly what the rest is going to be like when it is brought in.

We have seen Christ raised bodily from the dead, says Paul. We saw that this morning. And so now those who hope in him have a certain hope of being raised from the dead as he was at the end of time.

Paul's conviction, his certain hope, is that the only difference is in the timescale. Each in turn, he says, Christ, the firstfruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him.

[13 : 07] What is the certain hope that the resurrection gives us then? Well, there are at least three certain things Paul says we can set our hope on if our hope is in Jesus.

The first is reunion. Reunion with those who have died. Back in verse 18, Paul said one of the consequences that Christ has not been raised is that those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

But since Christ has been raised, he says he is the first of those who have fallen asleep. Now, falling asleep here is a euphemism where we're talking about dying.

And so he's saying that since Christ has been raised, those who died trusting in him will one day rise from the dead too. Something I think we all feel, whoever we are, is that when our loved ones die, we wish that somehow they could still be with us.

Sometimes to make people feel better, people say things, don't they, like they live on in our hearts. They're nearby, though you can't see them as if they are just in the next room.

[14 : 27] Even people who don't believe in a God or heaven or a spiritual world, hope beyond hope that their loved ones are not lost forever. But Jesus promises something better.

Better than the vague idea that we have not maybe lost the people we love. His resurrection promises a reunion. Not only in a spiritual sense, but in a physical sense.

Those who have died who belong to Jesus, says Paul, will be raised bodily to life again. As Jesus was raised bodily to life, and we will live together forever.

It's a much more concrete and satisfying hope than the sense that someone's spirit might be someone nearby. The resurrection promises the closeness and intimacy of a gentle touch.

A familiar voice. The old smile that we have lost through death. Paul says we have not lost that forever. If our hope is in him, that intimacy and love will be restored and healed.

[15 : 36] We will see and touch and hear the ones we love again, never to be separated. Your death is a terrible thing.

It's one of the hardest things that we have to suffer in this life. In fact, it's so wrong that Jesus himself on earth wept bitterly at the grave side of his friend Lazarus.

Then we read Jesus called to him. And what happened? Lazarus walked out of the grave alive again. And they ate together. And spoke and walked together again.

Jesus' resurrection gives that hope of reunion to everyone who puts their hope in him to take away their death. To raise us from the dead. But if that wasn't hope enough for us ourselves, Jesus' resurrection, secondly, says Paul, gives us the hope of a restored universe.

Not only our relationships, but the cosmos itself. That's what Paul's talking about when he says in verse 24, For then the end will come when Jesus hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.

[16 : 50] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. For he must reign until he has been destroyed. That we all know, don't we? Don't need to be reminded that the world is not right.

People, as we heard, are not always kind or happy as they could be. But we know instinctively, too, that the problem is deeper than everyone being a little bit unkind or a little bit unhappy.

And yet, somehow it still surprises us, doesn't it? When we see things like war in Ukraine happen. Or double standards exposed in the halls of power.

When people that we love hold views that we find difficult. Sometimes we're shocked, as if we should all know better than that by now. But history teaches us that humanity has never grown out of our bad habits.

If I can put it like that. It's not something that we can unlearn. Wrongness and evil and sin, as the Bible calls it, are not a phase in human existence.

[17 : 57] Sin is part of our lives, part of this world. And it has been since the fall of humanity. And it will be until the end of the world. Sin is the instinct in our hearts that wants nothing to do with God.

Wants to take control of our own lives, our own world instead. And the Bible says that that self-love and pride is at the root of all that is wrong in our world. Why have the wars and the scandals and divisions not stopped?

Why don't we know better than this? Why isn't everyone a bit kinder, a bit happier? Why don't we know better than this? Why don't we know better than this? Because the sin in our hearts has not gone away. And so it shouldn't surprise us that our world is still going wrong.

But Jesus' resurrection, says Paul, promises a day in the future when the whole world will be put right. Sin will be taken away.

Evil will be finished. He, that is Jesus, must reign, says Paul, until he's put all his enemies under his feet. And so the fact that he lives, the fact that he is raised, gives us hope of a restored cosmos.

[19 : 10] The day that Jesus rose from the dead was the beginning, the first day of a new creation. The universe that God created was very good, without sin or wrong.

And the Bible promises it will be that way again. When Jesus returns to put it all back together as it was meant to be. Everything brought back under Christ, under God, so that God might be all in all.

This new world, a new cosmos, is what Jesus' resurrection promises to those who hope in him. And not only we will be put right, but everything will be put right.

Our hearts will be wiped completely free from sin. Death will be no more. Every tear wiped away. And we will live with God perfectly. Forever.

In a world put right. But how will we live there? We've touched on this as we've gone along. But Paul spends basically the rest of this chapter unpacking this truth.

[20 : 18] Because it's so good. We don't have so much time to get into it this evening. But lastly, Jesus' resurrection gives us the hope of a resurrection body. A resurrection body.

Someone will ask, he says, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come? As I say, we don't have time to explore all the details here. But it's a big vision of the Bible's promise of life after death.

And the thing I want us to take away from it this evening is that the hope Jesus' resurrection gives us is not only spiritual life in heaven, but new physical life on earth in a renewed world.

I think even if we've been Christians a long time, we come to think that our big hope for the future is that our souls will go to heaven when we die. But heaven isn't where the story ends.

Because the final hope that Jesus' resurrection gives us is not that we will go up to heaven, but that heaven will come down to us. Because Jesus himself will come down from heaven and raise our bodies from the dead.

[21 : 30] I tell you a mystery, says Paul. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed. In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Our great hope as Christians is the resurrection body. What will that resurrection body be like?

Well, it will be our same bodies, but changed, says Paul. Changed how? Well, the words that he uses there in verses 42 and 43 and 44.

Imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual. Our bodies here and now break down, get sick, grow old, decay, die.

Our resurrection bodies will not be like that. They will be imperishable, immortal, untouchable. Ever since the garden, our bodies have often been a source of shame or embarrassment.

[22 : 41] Our resurrection bodies will not be like that. They will have honor, be glorious, says Paul. Our bodies now are weak.

We get tired, we need sleep, we get hungry and need food. We wear out. We reach the limits of our capacity. There's only so much we can do. Our resurrection bodies will not be like that.

They will be powerful, says Paul, and belong to the spiritual realm and not the natural realm.

It's tough to get our heads around, isn't it? But how do we know? How do we know we will have bodies like this? Because, Paul writes in Philippians chapter 3, from heaven we await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our loathing body to be like his glorious body.

Jesus' resurrected body tells us that if we hope in him, we will be raised one day from the dead when he comes with a body that is like his.

[23 : 49] imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual. Which caps off the Bible's great and certain hope for our future, the promise that one day our bodies will be raised and made perfect in a restored universe, made right under God's loving rule without sin or sickness, suffering or death.

And we will be there forever with God himself and those whom we have loved and lost in Christ, if our hope rests in this resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

And so finally then to close, Paul concludes in light of that certain and great hope that in Christ we are victorious. In Christ we are victorious.

Thanks be to God, he writes. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. victory suggests winning, doesn't it?

Coming out on top. And that is here and now, he says, not only in the future, if our hope is in Christ, we are untouchable in this world.

[25 : 00] Nothing, nothing can steal, take away, dim, even our hope for this better world, for this brighter future, because it is secured and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ all those years ago.

Because he rose again, we know that we too will rise again in a world made right. And so through Jesus, we, as we are, here and now, have victory, says Paul.

You can go as far as gloating over death. Verse 55, where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? That is how much confidence we can have, even in the face of the ultimate and last enemy, death.

That even death holds no fear and no threat and no power over those who hope in Christ. Friends, in Christ, we cannot lose. We cannot lose.

And so, in the light of this great and certain hope, let me invite you this evening, if you have not already, to settle your hope in Christ.

[26 : 13] Only he is risen from the dead. Only he can raise us from the dead. And so this glorious future is only ours if our hope is in him.

The Bible assures us he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

He always lives. He lives today. And so we, as we are, can draw near to God through him and be saved completely. He holds out to us this future better than anything this world can offer.

And if you do have your hope in him today, let's not hold that hope loosely. Set your heart fully on these promises that he holds out to us through his resurrection.

The world offers us such an array, doesn't it, of visions of the good life. So many hopes that we can cling onto, so many small wishes, so many things that we work for in vain.

[27 : 20] But let me urge you, brothers and sisters, not to settle for less than God promises through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He wants more for you than to have a good job and a nice house and a happier life.

He says, in Jesus, I am going to give you a new world and a new body and eternal life and glory and myself with you. And so, brothers and sisters, fix your hope on Christ and do not hope for anything less than he has promised through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together for that. Let's pray. God, our Father, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Our Father, our hearts are overwhelmed at the thought of the future that you promised to those who trust in Jesus. We confess, our Father, that we cannot get our heads around it.

We cannot even imagine what you will do and give to us who are in Christ. And yet, we trust your promise.

[28 : 47] And because we know Jesus is risen, Lord, we know for certain that these things will come to pass. Father, we pray that you would please help us when that hope dims and when the suffering and pain and distress and grief, Lord, in this life overshadows that great hope.

Lord, we are so prone to being overwhelmed by the things that we face here and now. Lord, you know that we are dust. And so we pray that by your Spirit you would help us to cling to the promise of your word.

Lord, that when we do walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we would fear no evil. Lord, that we would know that death holds no threat. We thank you, Lord, for the victory that you give us through our Lord Jesus Christ and pray that you would help us to live into it.

Lord, to let it be seen in our lives, that it would transform our hearts, that it would transform our living. Father, we pray that you would help us please by faith to take hold of this wonderful hope that you set before us.

We thank you, Father, for making it so available, so freely available to sinners like ourselves that we might simply put our trust in Jesus and have life forever with you.

[30 : 13] So we thank you, our Father, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.

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Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.