

Hope

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[0 : 0 0] These are the words of the living God. We have heard the word of the Lord, so let us pray for his help to take it to heart. Our Father, we thank you for the living words of the living Lord Jesus Christ, and we pray that as we see him and hear him this morning, that his words would cut to the heart, that his words would expose us and provide for us the hope, the faith, the joy that you invite us to place in him. Father, we pray that by your Spirit you would draw us to Christ this morning, we ask in his name. Amen.

I wonder, what are you hoping for? We hope for all kinds of different things, don't we? Perhaps you hope for peace in the world, you hope for wars to end. On a more personal level today, perhaps you hope that you've done enough to get through your exams, get through the interview. Perhaps you hope that someone you love gets better from illness. Perhaps you hope that they will say yes to the proposal, the request, the invitation. More immediately, perhaps you hope that lunch isn't burning in the oven. You hope that the children won't melt down this afternoon. You hope that the sermon won't be too long. Those are all, aren't they, pretty different types of hope.

But we hold them all in our hearts. We live and breathe hope. And that's most obvious when the opposite is sadly true. Some of us this morning know what it feels like to lose hope and the weight of despair in our hearts. You can't see a way forward, a way out of our position, and it crushes the life out of us. Hope isn't just a nice word or a happy feeling, is it? It's essential for life. It's essential as blood in our veins, as food on our table. In fact, without hope, even blood and food lose their meaning. If we have nothing to hope for, what is there to live for?

This morning, we are beginning a short series leading up to Easter, looking at the hope that is found in Jesus. And that is a hope of a kind all of its own. The best way of explaining Christian hope that I've come across is this, a joyful expectation for the future, based on true events in the past that changes everything about my present. If you were here with us a couple of years ago for the Hope Explored course that we ran, or maybe you've seen it online, that will be familiar to you. We are shamelessly borrowing from Hope Explored because it's as good a way as any that we could think of into Christian hope. And it has the benefit, too, of having resources online, okay, so that you can go and actually look at these passages for yourself, look at the hope of Jesus personally, and we hope, even better, study these passages with somebody in your life who hasn't heard of the hope that is in Jesus or hasn't taken hold of it for themselves. You, of course, as

Christians, we need to be renewed in the hope that God gives us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Easter is a great time for us to do that. But part of what we want is to equip you to share that hope with others in your life. Paul writes in Peter, rather, in his first letter, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks to give the reason for the hope that you have.

[4 : 1 3] And so part of what we want to do is that preparation that we might all be ready to share with others why we have hope in life and in death. And if we're going to hold out that hope to others, we need, don't we, of course, to have a firm grasp on our hope in our own hearts.

And so this morning, we're beginning with the hope that is offered through Jesus' life, and this account from Luke's gospel about two people who came to Jesus with hope. Let's see then first what it looks like to hope boldly in Jesus. Jesus has by now reached celebrity status in the gospel. The crowds are waiting for him as he sails back onto home turf. He's been over in a non-Jewish part of the world. He is coming back into Jewish territory. And it's important that we pick that up because of the way that the first person who comes to Jesus is described. Then a man called Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house.

So this is an important man in the community. The synagogue was the heart of community life, and this man is a leader or a ruler in the synagogue. He's not described as a priest or a scribe or teacher, so perhaps he didn't have a kind of vocational position in the synagogue. But certainly he would have been looked up to and held in high regard. He would have been known and recognized around the town. Even his name is recorded in the gospel, Jairus. But this important man came and fell at Jesus' feet.

There's no taking him aside for a quiet word. No, this man comes, this prominent figure, and falls at Jesus' feet. The word is really more like collapsed and began to plead with Jesus, to beg him to come to his house because something terrible was happening. His 12-year-old daughter, his only daughter, was dying.

It's incredible to even imagine, isn't it, the pain and the grief that would have brought this man to his knees in public in a crowd before Jesus. The desperation as he cried out to him to come to his house. He is helpless, but he is not hopeless because he has come and collapsed at the feet of a man who has not only healed the sick but raised the dead. We read earlier from the chapter just before this, a very similar sequence of events. Another important man, a centurion, sent word to Jesus because his servant was dying and Jesus healed him.

[7 : 24] And then Jesus passes by a funeral, and as the coffin is being carried to the grave, Jesus raised this woman's son back to life.

Now, whether or not Jairus knew about those incidents, we know by now who Jairus has come before, who he's pleading with, and we know that he has come to exactly the right person.

But who is this man hoping in? Where is his trust? We have to ask, because on his way to Jairus' house, a very different person comes to Jesus in a very different way. Now, we can picture the scene. Jesus is on his way to the house, nearly being crushed by the pressing crowds as he tries to get through, and there in the crowd, we read, was a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. Now, who is she? Luke invites us to spot the difference, if you like, compare and contrast these two people. One is a man, one a woman. One has a name, the other doesn't.

One is held in high regard in the religious community. The other is not. We know that because this woman has been bleeding for 12 years. When women bled in the old covenant community, they were counted ceremonially unclean. So, she wouldn't have been allowed in the synagogue at all to participate in the worship and life of God's people for 12 years, the same number of years that since Jairus' daughter was born. And it's not as if she hadn't tried every possible treatment.

Luke, who was himself a doctor, tells us no one could heal her. Some of you know the frustration of being on an NHS waiting list. You get to the end of the list and perhaps the treatment doesn't work, and you get put on another list, and you wait, and you get to the end of the list, and perhaps that treatment doesn't work. This woman knows all about dashed hope. She knows all about waiting lists.

[9 : 57] How many times in 12 years had she hoped to be better and hoped to be welcomed back into the spiritual community and been left without a cure and without a welcome? Like Jairus, she is helpless, but like Jairus, she is not hopeless because she too comes to Jesus who heals the sick and raises the dead.

But she comes, doesn't she, in a very different way than he came? Again, Luke is saying, spot the difference. Jairus fell before Jesus. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. Jairus came very publicly.

She came very secretly. And Luke is doing that so that we can see the point that he wants to make. Now, what is it? We might be tempted to say, well, this woman didn't have a bold hope like Jairus.

She didn't come out in public or step out of the crowd. She did it ever so timidly and ever so secretly. But the point is actually that of the two, it's the woman who got what she hoped for.

See, that immediately her bleeding stopped. Now, why is that significant? Well, again, spot the difference. Has the synagogue leader's daughter been made well again?

[11 : 27] Why not? We want to say that it's because Jesus hasn't got to the house yet, but we remember the centurion's servant. What did the centurion say? Lord, don't trouble yourself. I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. This is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you, but say the word and my servant will be healed. Friends, Jesus does not need to be physically present to heal the sick and raise the dead. So, for all of Jairus' public pleading with Jesus to come to his house, he hasn't yet asked, has he, the golden question. He hasn't yet trusted in Jesus to bring his daughter back from the point of death. Jesus was quite right to say to the centurion, I have not found such great faith even in Israel. You were meant to see that the synagogue leader, despite being a synagogue leader, does not have the bold hope or the humble faith of those who count themselves unworthy even to be in the presence of Jesus, but nevertheless trust wholeheartedly in his power to lift the curse in their lives. Despite this public display of desperation, he does not have the heart that this woman had to come to Jesus trusting that his power did not depend on who she was or where she was, but simply to work through her faith to heal her as she was, here and now, not because of her performance before him or the way that she came into his presence, but because of her simple reliance on him.

Jesus makes that very point in verse 48, why is she healed? Then he said, daughter, your faith has healed you. Your faith has healed you. Go in peace.

Jesus, I wonder, is your hope as bold as this woman's hope? On what basis do you expect Jesus to act in your life?

I wonder, do you think in your heart, if only I was more important in the church, if I was more religious or if I was a better Christian, then Jesus might take an interest in me?

Or maybe, is it how I pray or how often I pray and how I come that will get Jesus' attention? Now, that is hope, isn't it? It is hope, but hope in what? It is hope in you, in your effort, what you put in, how you come to get Jesus' interest and to put him to work.

[14 : 36] And that is not a very high hope, because as the centurion put it, and as this woman knows, we are unworthy of his time, and we are unworthy to come before him.

Or brothers and sisters, do you expect Jesus rather to act and work in your life? Because you simply trust him to be who he is.

That with a word, he can give life to the dead and dying. And that on the spot, he has the power to make an unclean and unworthy person, completely whole and completely clean.

That is the faith that Jesus recognizes, because it is faith in him and not you to save you. Now, that doesn't mean there is no need or onus to come publicly to Jesus, to declare our hope and our faith in him.

Actually, the woman does do that, doesn't she? Jesus deliberately calls her out of the crowd to speak with her. But even how she comes is so humble, seeing she couldn't go unnoticed.

[15 : 44] She came such that she was compelled to come almost against her will into the presence of Jesus. But she came trembling and fell at his feet, almost the very same way Jairus came, back in verse 41, but actually more intensely.

Trembling she came. And the word for fell is even stronger. And in the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.

See, brothers and sisters, this woman was not bold in herself, was she? She was not trusting in who she was, and she was not hoping in how she came.

But she was bold to hope in Jesus. And I hope you know to come to Jesus with faith and with hope. And to do that openly and publicly, you don't have to think much of yourself, or of your heart, or of your faith.

It's actually those who know how unworthy they are to come, who come most confidently to Jesus because of who he is, and not who they are.

[17 : 02] We know that because it was the unworthy, unnamed, unclean woman who was sent away in peace and made whole, and in the original, not only healed, but saved.

And it's a lovely touch, isn't it, that Jesus calls her? What does he call her? Daughter. As if to say that this woman means as much to him as Jairus' little girl meant to her dad.

Meanwhile, the synagogue leader is anything but at peace. What about his daughter? Because now he is forced to face the question, is my situation beyond hope?

This is our second point from verse 49. While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. Your daughter is dead, he said. Don't bother the teacher anymore.

So while Jesus has been speaking with the woman, the worst has happened. Before Jesus could get to the house, Jairus' daughter has died. And just as, if not more so, this woman had experienced so many times in her life, now Jairus' hope is demolished.

[18 : 23] See the conclusion that the messenger draws from the fact, your daughter is dead. Don't bother the teacher anymore. Hey, Jairus, it's over. No point bringing Jesus all the way to the house.

It's strange, isn't it? When doctors give bad news, they'll say sometimes, there's nothing more we can do. Here is the patient's family telling the doctor, there's nothing more you can do.

Face the facts, it's too late. But Jesus is going to show this family that he can still be boldly hoped in, even in situations that to us are beyond hope and are too late.

He overhears the message, verse 50, and says, don't be afraid, just believe, and she will be healed. Now for anyone else to say that would be incredibly dismissive, wouldn't it?

And misleading. But, in fact, these are the very same words that Jesus says to the woman that he's just healed. Your faith or belief has healed or saved you.

[19 : 34] It has happened before their very eyes. So now when he says to Jairus, believe, have faith, and she will be saved, healed.

Well, our heart should leap at the thought that he's going to do it again. But bigger, he's made a huge promise. And he is inviting now this grieving father to put his hope and his trust in him and that promise of resurrection.

It's interesting that when he gets there, Jesus makes it as least like a performance as he can. He only takes three of his disciples in and the mom and dad. He dismisses the mourners.

When people died in that culture, it was the done thing for friends and family to go to the house and kind of publicly wail and mourn sometimes for days on end. Well, stop wailing, Jesus says.

She is not dead, but asleep. And again, what do they do? They write Jesus off. They laughed at him, knowing she was dead.

[20 : 44] If we were in any doubt that she was dead, here is the proof. But more than that, they're laughter. Like the messenger's words show a disbelief or an unbelief that exists in the synagogue ruler's home and heart compared with that bold hope and belief of a nameless, shunned, and unclean woman who has been healed and saved.

And if we're honest, who are we more like? Would we believe Jesus if he had been there ourselves?

The death certificate's right here, Jesus. We're already planning the funeral, and you think you can just come and wake her up? We'd all like to think that someone could. We'd love to live in that parallel universe, but it's too late.

It's beyond hope now. But he took her by the hand and said, My child, get up.

Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished.

[22 : 00] Jairus was desperate for Jesus to come to the rescue when his little girl was sick. He despaired of Jesus' help when she died, but for Jesus, the fact that she was dead was no barrier to his saving power.

Jairus' household thought their situation was beyond hope, but Jesus made a promise. He gave them hope, and he delivered on it. And you get the sense that Jairus and his wife were just in disbelief.

They were astonished. But if they knew who it was that they were really dealing with, well, yes, they would be amazed, but they wouldn't have been surprised. The woman was not surprised that she was instantly healed when she reached out to Jesus in hope.

She was full of awe and full of fear. She trembled before him, but she was not shocked that she stopped bleeding.

She could explain why she touched him. That's what she knew would happen when she reached out to Jesus, and it did. Not so the synagogue leader and his family, even after Jesus repeated promises and assurances, his compassion in coming to their home, and his power in healing an incurable health problem, they are still astonished to see their daughter rise from the dead at Jesus' command.

[23 : 30] There's still a part of them that can't let go of their disbelief even as they're going to the kitchen to bring her back something to eat. Two people, two seemingly hopeless situations, but two kinds of hope.

Friends, Jesus shows without a doubt that he can deliver on the hope that he gives. There is nothing that he promises that he cannot do and that he will not do for those who trust him for it.

So where is your hope resting for the promises that seem too good to be true? You might have friends or family suffering with their health and you long to get better.

Most of us, if not all of us, have lost someone who we long to see again. Now we need to be careful. Jesus doesn't promise to do for us here and now what he did for these people then.

But he has made an even bigger promise and an even better promise that the healing of this woman and the raising of this little girl both point towards.

[24 : 47] And that is that on a set day in history, he will come back to this earth again and do for every single person who has ever hoped in him what he did for this woman and this little girl.

He will come, says the Bible, and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

No more sickness. No more death. We will be made whole and ye with bodies that cannot break down or get diseases or die or decay.

Brothers and sisters, if that promise does not sound as good as somebody getting better next week or that person not having passed away, well, remember that this woman and this little girl both eventually still died.

We don't know how or when, but they are not here now to tell us, are they? And yet through faith in Jesus they were saved. And so one day they will rise again free from sickness and pain, frailty and old age.

[26 : 11] And I reckon if you ask them on that day, which was better? Little girl, when Jesus brought you back the first time or when he raised you from the dead never to die again?

Woman, when Jesus healed your body the first time or when he made your body immortal and imperishable? I reckon they will both say when Jesus healed me, when he raised me from the dead, that was astonishing.

It was incredible. But this resurrection life, this new world is infinitely better than the 60 or 70 years that I had the first time round in the old order.

Now perhaps that future just sounds too good to be true, but remember what Christian hope is, a joyful expectation for the future based on true events in the past that changes everything about my present.

If it sounds like Jesus is over-promising and offering hope beyond hope, remember that in these words he has given us a preview and a foretaste in his life on earth as he healed people's broken bodies and as he brought the dead back to life.

[27 : 36] So it's not wishful thinking, friends, to hope in his promise to come again and to make all things new. It is a joyful expectation for the future based on true events in the past.

And that changes everything about our present. Our lives now are fueled by hope and Jesus offers the best and most certain hope that we could ever possibly have for our future.

So what are you going to do? Where are you going to put your hope? Will you put your hope in what you can manage to do?

What you think you can put towards that promise? Whatever it is, yourself, your identity, your status, your efforts or performance to convince Jesus to act or to deliver on his promises or will you put your hope completely in him and in his power and his work and his compassion to save you and make good on his promises to you?

Or to put it another way, do you trust wholeheartedly that he will bring about what he's promised for you because of who he is and what he has done in history?

[28 : 57] Or will you be taken by surprise on the day that he returns because you didn't quite believe the promise that he actually would come and do it?

If you're new with us and you're not yet convinced about what we've seen here this morning or the accounts of Jesus' life, please catch someone after the service. He would love to speak with you about that.

Come back next Sunday and see more of Jesus. Jesus. But if you know that this really happened in history and believe the record of his life to be true, why would you not have a joyful expectation and a bold hope and a confident faith in him and his promise to raise you and welcome you into his new world at the end of time?

Why would we have this reserved and half-baked hope and faith of the synagogue leader outwardly invested in Jesus but inwardly reserved for ourselves?

Why would we not have the bold hope and the confident faith of this nameless, unclean woman who knew beyond doubt that when she reached out to Jesus in faith, she would be saved?

[30 : 16] If you haven't yet reached out to Jesus with all your hope in him and all your trust resting in him, well, let me urge you not to keep that held back in your heart or put off to another day.

Reach out to him today and you will be saved. And when you reach out to him and if you have reached out to him, then come and tremble in awe before him.

Speak with him. Fall at his feet in worship of him and tell anyone who will listen why it is that you reached out to him and how it was that he immediately saved you.

Let's praise him and thank him as we pray together. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Gracious God, we thank you and we praise you as the God of all comforts.

Our Father, we thank you for the comfort of the gospel that comforts us in all our affliction. We thank you, Father, for the hope that you have set before us in Jesus Christ and Father, we confess that we struggle to set our hope in him because he promises things that we cannot see and Lord, we do not feel and Lord, in the face of loss and sickness and pain, our Father, we confess that our hearts are weak to hope in you but Lord, as we see Jesus and as we read the account of his life and that he healed the sick and raised the dead, our Father, we pray that you would grant us by your spirit a great hope in the future that he promises to all who trust in him.

[32 : 16] Lord, fire our hearts, we pray, with that great hope. Lord, we thank you for his death and resurrection. We thank you that he lives and Lord, we pray for any here who have not as yet had that new birth into the living hope that he gives and that you would grant it by your Holy Spirit.

Lord, keep us pressing on to that great day when he comes with our faith confidently resting in him for we pray in his name. Amen.

Amen.