

Easter Sunday 2016 | Resurrection Hope

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Date: 27 March 2016

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[0 : 00] Well, as hopefully you have gathered by now, this is Easter Sunday. We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. We focus on this theme all throughout the year.

It is the central defining foundation of hope in the Christian faith. That's something we'll come back to in a moment. And there are a lot of amazing things that we could say about the resurrection. We've actually looked at this particular account in previous years, John's account of the resurrection. It's amazing, for instance, that the disciples had no idea that a resurrection like this was possible.

There was no idea. It says here in John that they didn't understand the Scriptures sufficiently to even know to expect this. For them, this was a total shock, and they were terrified.

It's amazing to note that as the Bible gives us witnesses of the resurrection, seeking to establish the credibility of this story, we see that the first witnesses are women. This is a culture where women were not even permitted to give legal testimony in court.

[1 : 05] Sad to say. There are all kinds of amazing details that we could focus on, and sometimes it's hard to choose. But last night, for those of us who were here in the vigil, it was an amazing time.

Every corner of the room was filled, and it was just an extraordinary celebration. But one of the themes that we really explored together was this idea that we live in a culture that is very deeply conflicted.

On the one hand, for those of you who weren't there, we talked about the fact that on the one hand, our culture is very much entrenched in a sort of a pure materialistic atheism.

In other words, the idea that there's no gods, no miracles, no magic, no mystery, nothing. Anything we don't understand now, we will one day understand through science and technology. And then on the other hand, there is a deep human longing for the transcendent.

And we talked about how these two forces, as we live life buffeted by these forces, we often feel fragmented and torn apart. You know, we talked about examples like Maurice Sendak in his interview with Terry Gross saying, on the one hand, I don't believe in an afterlife, and yet on the other hand, I firmly believe I will see my deceased brother one day soon.

[2 : 26] We're all deeply fragmented on the inside. And we talked about how as a part of this, there's a tremendous disillusionment in the world. A tremendous cynicism has set in.

I really, if I can be honest, cannot remember a time, maybe since the Cold War, where there has been more of a sense of existential dread about the future of our country and our way of life.

I say that because I suspect it's not just me. I hope, anyway, I'm not just being too dramatic or morose. But I think this is something that we feel.

I mean, between ISIS and the threat of terrorism, you know, I was going to give the example of Brussels until Lahore happened. Today. Today. You know, dozens killed, hundreds wounded from a bomb blast.

Between the kind of tragicomedy of our current election. I don't trust myself to say anything more about that. At least not up here. The state of the economy.

[3 : 40] These are things that are causing an enormous amount of anxiety. And so now that this Easter Sunday has come in this context, as I've prayed about this, I think that we need to look more closely at the hope that the resurrection offers.

Because as we said last night, we live in a Holy Saturday culture that is desperately in need of Easter Sunday hope. And so we want to look at that hope. And we want to do that by looking at 1 Peter.

The book of 1 Peter is wonderfully appropriate because Peter wrote this letter to Christians who are spread out throughout Asia Minor, and they're living in a hostile culture. They're living in a culture

where there are very few certainties that they will have any quality of life or life at all. So if you sort of skip ahead in 1 Peter, you see in chapter 2 that they're dealing with overbearing, brutal bosses who are mistreating them. So in their jobs, they're experiencing hardship. In chapter 3, you see that many of them are married to unbelieving spouses, and they're struggling in interfaith marriages. You see in chapter 4 that they're being mocked and persecuted by their pagan neighbors and associates.

[4 : 55] They're being made fun of and disrespected. And then in chapter 4, verses 12 to 18, it looks as though much more violent persecution is imminently on the horizon.

And so all of this is happening, and Peter's writing this letter, and Peter begins writing this letter of hope by talking about Easter.

He says the first thing you have to understand if you want to have any hope in this world is you have to understand Easter and what Easter means. And so that's what we're going to look at. We're just going to look at one verse. We just have time to look at one verse, one aspect of this. And it's 1 Peter 1, verse 3. And we're going to see this under three headers. We're going to see the foundation of our hope, the substance of our hope, and then the reason for our hope.

So let's pray as we prepare to open God's Word together. Heavenly Father, first and foremost, we pray for whatever emergency is outside.

[5 : 56] We pray for people to be protected and kept safe and restored. And we also, Lord, as we turn our attention to your Word, we trust in and pray for your promise to be fulfilled, that you speak to us through your Word.

So I pray that you would gently but firmly move me out of the way, that you would dispel any distractions or things that might be nagging at us, and that you would open us all to hear what you might have to say.

We pray this in your risen Son's name. Amen. So first of all, we want to look at the foundation of the hope that we share. It says in verse 3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His great mercy, He's caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

So as we said a moment ago, the resurrection is a fact, it's an event, and it forms the foundation of our hope.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus, after His resurrection, appeared to more than 500 people. And he's saying this for a reason, because he's writing 1 Corinthians.

[7 : 11] 1 Corinthians is the oldest account that we have. It was written, it's the oldest book that we have in the New Testament that was written the closest in proximity to the actual resurrection.

So Paul is writing that letter, and he's saying this about 500 witnesses, because many of those people were still alive. And it's Paul's way of saying, if you don't believe me, go ask these people. They're everywhere. Go ask them and see what they say. And in Acts chapter 26, you have Paul before King Agrippa, and again he says about the resurrection of Jesus, he says to King Agrippa, you know that these things are true.

You know that these things didn't happen in a closet. They didn't happen in a corner somewhere. So the debate then was not whether the resurrection happened. The debate was only concerning, how do we make sense of the resurrection?

It's interesting when you have so many people who are trying to discredit Jesus and the early Christians, never do they try to discredit the resurrection. That's something that happened later. It's because too many people had seen it for themselves.

[8 : 16] So you have this public event, this public historic fact, and Peter makes it clear that this event is the whole reason we have hope. So the first point is this, is that our foundation is based on a public event, a historical fact.

And the reason we're making a point of this, you may say, well, okay, well that, okay, so what? The reason this matters is because this is one of the things that makes Christianity unique.

We talk about, well, why can we find hope in the Christian faith that we can't find anywhere? And here's one of the reasons. All religions have some element of belief, right? I mean, you think religion, faith, belief, they just kind of go together.

But religious belief usually involves adopting the values and the lifestyle of the religious founder. So you read their teachings or you hear their teachings and you like what they have to say and so you believe in them, meaning you adopt their values and you begin to live in the way that they've

prescribed.

There are a lot of shoulds in religious belief. You should be a good person. You should not be greedy. You should care about other people. You should take care of the weak. All of these things that many religions in the world agree on are good things.

[9 : 37] But when Christians talk about belief, we actually mean something different. Christians don't, by definition, have religious beliefs. We have historical beliefs that have religious implications.

You see the difference? So this makes a huge difference when it comes to having real hope because facts actually offer hope in ways that values don't. And I think I've used this example before, but this is kind of like the difference between believing in the value of freedom and believing that slavery is wrong on the one hand versus believing that on January 31st, 1865, the 13th Amendment abolished slavery.

Right? So one is a value and one is a historic fact. And so I'll just ask you, which one offers more hope to you if you're a slave? Right?

If I come and I hear that you're a slave and I say, well, I really value freedom and I really personally hope that one day you're free versus, hey, good news. You're free.

You may not know it. You may not have ever heard of this amendment. You may not know how it all works. But you no longer have to live like this. You've been set free. Which is going to offer more hope? So Peter's not saying, when he talks about this, he's not saying, hey, you should really hear Jesus' teachings.

[11 : 05] I think they're pretty good. And I think that they're going to help you learn how to live better and maybe have more success in your job and have more success in your relationships. And I think they're going to teach you how to do better in your love life.

So you should really follow. He's not saying that. He's saying, listen, this thing happened. Jesus rose from death. And because of that, he's given us an entirely new life, an entirely new way of being.

He's ushered in a completely new way for human beings to exist in the world. So this is the first thing, is that the foundation of our hope is not a set of values or teachings.

It's not a set of principles. It's actually a person and an event that surrounds that person, namely the resurrection from death. So then what does this actually offer us?

What's the substance of our hope? Well, again, coming back to the verse, it says this, according to his great mercy, God has caused us to be born again to a living hope.

[12 : 07] So this is the substance. What do we have? What does the resurrection mean for you? It means that you have the opportunity to be born again to a living hope. Now, when I say that, if you're anything like me, you hear the phrase born again, and, you know, it's abrasive.

That phrase is a huge turnoff for me and for most of us, and it's because of the water we swim in. Right? I mean, when we think of the phrase born again, we think of that as a subset of Christianity. You know, you have your mainliners and you have your, you know, blah, blah, blah, and then you have your born-again. I mean, when I lived in Boston, people don't even say born-again Christian up there. They just call them born-again.

You know, you're born-again. And it's like one word. And we think of this as a subset of Christianity. To be born again is a certain kind of Christian. And among Christians, we think of people who are born-again as either, you know, we think of being born-again as some kind of resolution we make. Like, I kind of grew up in the church, but now I'm getting serious. I'm a member of a church. I'm born again. Or we think of it as some kind of ecstatic religious experience. Right? So if somebody says, I've been born-again, you think, well, that must have been amazing.

[13 : 18] What happened? You know, the clouds parted and the light and the ecstatic vision of Jesus. You know, we think Damascus Road experience. In addition, people outside the church, if they hear someone's a born-again, they think of religious fundamentalism, right?

They think of religious extremism. They think of right-wing politics. They think of all the stuff that goes with that. But that's much more culture than it is Scripture.

So how do we think about this from a scriptural standpoint? In August of 2010, there was a woman named Judy Rivers.

And she went to her local bank to open a bank account. And as part of that, she gave her Social Security card over and told them the number. And the woman entered some information and entered more and said, Ms. Rivers, I'm sorry.

There's been a problem. I'll be right back. Eventually, the branch manager comes out and the branch manager says, I'm sorry to say this, there's an issue. Your Social Security number was deactivated in 2008 due to death.

[14 : 25] It's pretty interesting. Clerical error. So it's estimated that every year, roughly 12,200 people are declared legally dead from keystroke error.

So somebody just hits the wrong button and you have no idea. You're just going along with your day, but you're dead. Isn't that amazing?

Keystroke error, right? So the Bible says the same thing is true of us spiritually. I mean, imagine if you're Judy Rivers and you're going about your business, you're living your life, you have no idea that anything is amiss, but in the government's eyes, you are legally dead.

Right? The Bible actually says that the same is true of us spiritually. That you can be living life, you can be going about your business, you can be doing, everything feels normal. You may not feel anything.

You may not be aware of anything. You know, if somebody asks you, you're like, my life is pretty great. Yeah, I feel pretty good. I feel pretty satisfied at work. Got good friendships and like my family and got enough money and things are going well.

[15 : 41] You don't really feel like anything is amiss. And yet spiritually, you can be legally dead. This is what happens when we ignore God and the world that he's made.

What we're doing is we're actually cutting ourselves off from the source of life. And what that means is you can go on living physically for a while, but you're spiritually dead.

And then eventually, your body catches up as entropy sets in and you break down and eventually you pass away. And again, as we talked about last night, while you can't feel it and there's no guarantee that you will feel it and there are plenty of people who are spiritually dead but have no awareness of it, I actually think that there is a level at which, as we talked about at the vigil, that yearning is telling us something about our spiritual state.

There's a great book of short stories by a writer named Douglas Copeland. It's called Life After God. And it's fascinating. And in one place, he's describing the life of his friends who live in Vancouver. And, you know, Vancouver's one of those places if you've ever been there, it's not just kind of more of an atheistic era. It's like a self-consciously sort of proudly atheistic culture. And very secular in parts.

[17 : 11] And it says this. He says, Ours was a life lived in paradise and thus it rendered any discussion of the transcendent pointless. Right?

Everything's good. We're going out at night. We're partying. We're having fun. We have great jobs. We're going 100 miles an hour. The world is our oyster. There's no room to talk about or speculate about things like life after death or God or forgiveness because life is great.

And then you go on and it says this. And yet, I find myself speaking these words with a sense of doubt. I think there was a trade-off somewhere along the line. I think the price we paid for our golden life was an inability to fully believe in love.

He goes on. Instead, we gained an irony that scorched everything it touched. So what's he saying? You know, life seems great but then I realized that one of the things that is set in in my heart is irony.

It's cynicism. And as we said last night, cynicism, if you're a disillusioned person, cynicism can be great insulation against disillusionment. You wrap it around yourself like bubble wrap and it can really insulate you from the full brunt of a brutal, godless world.

[18 : 27] And yet, because it's bubble wrap, it not only insulates you from the bad stuff, it insulates you from the good stuff. And so what's what's he saying here? I can't fully experience things like love.

I can't experience things like joy fully because an irony is set in and it scorches everything it touches. And he says, and I wonder if this irony is the price we paid for the loss of God.

And then there's a moment of honesty later in the book. He says, now here's my secret. I tell it to you with the openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again. And so I pray that you're in a quiet room as you hear these words.

It's reasonably quiet in here. My secret is that I need God. I'm sick. I can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give because I no longer seem to be capable of giving. To help me be kind as I no longer seem capable of kindness. To help me love as I seem beyond being able to love.

[19 : 36] You know, it's interesting. We can be completely unaware of our spiritual poverty until we begin to try to do things like practice kindness or love or generosity.

And we can do it for a time. But sooner or later we come face to face with the reality. About what? About us. And in verses 23 to 25 of 1 Peter chapter 1, it says that we become born again when we hear the good news of the gospel and we receive it.

It's what happens when God opens our hearts to the truth of the gospel. And that is this, that Jesus came and He lived and then He died and then He rose from death to free us from sin and make us children of God and give us the Spirit which quickens us to life.

That's an old word, quickens. but the Spirit quickens us to life. It awakens us. I remember when I became a believer at age 22 and the years that followed that.

I remember actually in the months that followed my conversion, I remember I would cry all the time. I don't think, this is not true for different people who have different experiences.

[20 : 51] For me, I just cried a lot. I probably cried more in that first month than I had cried in the 10 previous years. And it would be at the oddest things. I would just be walking along, walking down the sidewalk and just break down into tears such that I would have to sit down.

And I had an older, wiser friend, mentor, and I finally confessed this and I said, am I having a nervous breakdown? And he said, no, this is your heart coming to life.

You ever put your arm over a chair back and it falls asleep because of a lack of circulation and then you take it off and as the blood comes back, you have that pins and needles feeling and it feels almost like you can't stand it?

He said, that's kind of like what's happening in your heart right now. The Spirit of God quickens us to life and what this means is that as verse 4 says, we gain an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for us who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In other words, what is this saying? Everything we have in this life, it's bad news and good news. When you're born again, it means this. You realize that everything that we have in this life, a lot of this stuff, a lot of this, is going to perish.

[22 : 12] It's going to wither. Right? So in one sense, a lot of the things that we can be focused on, a lot of that is going to perish and it's going to wither. Right? God's going to remake and restore the earth.

He's going to remake all things new, the physical world, but that doesn't mean I'm going to take my iPhone into that. In fact, I think I know exactly where this belongs. That's a different sermon.

But what he's saying is that everything that we have in this life will one day be lost, but everything we gain through Jesus will never be lost. He's saying there's an eternal inheritance. It's not hot in here.

I want to show you something. So imagine this. Imagine this. Imagine this not. This is our life.

Here. You know, there's four little rings in it, right? This is when I was born. This is my adolescence. This is the good, productive middle years. This is old age and death.

[23 : 13] Right? Right? And he's saying all of this, all of this, a lot of what you're aiming for here, a lot of what you're focusing on here, this is going to fade. Right?

You know, you're focusing really, you know, working really hard to get a good education, right? So that you can get a good job, which is here. And then you get that good job and you hope that you can build up enough retirement so that your life will be decent here.

And then what? And he's saying on the one hand all this is going to fade. But on the other hand, all of this, all of this is secure.

Saying all of this, all of this has already been secured for you. It's there. It's waiting for you. You have to do nothing to earn it. You have to do nothing to preserve it. It's not going to fade.

It's not going to wither. It's not going to go away. It's just there. And he's saying, so where should your priorities be? What should you be focusing on? And so as we consider this, as we consider the reality of this perspective shift and what Peter's saying here, he's saying, this is the kind of hope that you have.

[24 : 22] If you think this is all there is, if you think that this is it, if you think that this is all you've got to look forward to, then listen, when things get bad for you and you're looking at this and you're like, this is all there is, what's going to happen?

It's going to crush you. Because you're like, this is all there is, this is my whole life. It better be a good one. But if things get good and you only think that this is it, then you'll be prone to anxiety because why?

Because this is all I got and now it's good and it better stay good. So you get so afraid of protecting it and preserving it that you can't really even enjoy it. But if your hope is set on all of this, instead of this, then when life is hard, what happens?

You say, well, no matter what, this is nothing. It's minuscule. I've got eternity. And when things are good, you know that you're fully free to enjoy them because you know as good as this is, it's nothing compared to what will come.

And I think if we think about that and how it would shape the way we live, this is real hope. So we know the foundation of our hope is the resurrection and we know that the substance of our hope is that we're born again to an eternal inheritance.

[25 : 43] So the last question remains is this, what about the reason we have this to begin with? How do we get this from God? Why does God do this? Is there anything that we do to ensure that God does this for us?

How do we get this kind of hope? The opening of our verse tells us, it says, according to God's mercy all of this happens. Now we won't spend a lot of time on this.

We're running out of time, just a few minutes left, but we have to acknowledge one thing. Mercy went out of fashion a long time ago. Really, mercy is a very unpopular idea.

It hasn't been popular for some time and here's the reason. The whole concept of mercy implies that I've done something wrong and I need mercy. And that's not a very popular idea.

Right? Because here's the way we think, right? Ever since the Enlightenment, really, we think, well, if there's a standard out there and I'm not meeting that standard, then the problem is clearly not with me.

[26 : 49] The problem is clearly with the standard. And so, over the last couple of centuries, moral relativism was our cultural attempt to make mercy unnecessary. Right?

So, we wanted to make mercy obsolete. So, we did away with any universal standard whatsoever. But listen, all of that is changing.

I don't know if you've been reading the articles that have been coming out in places like American Spectator, Atlantic, Jonathan Merritt had a great piece there, David Brooks in the New York Times, basically saying that moral relativism is coming to an end.

It's on the decline. David Brooks says this, he wrote a great article called The Shame Culture. He says, and he's drawing from Andy Crouch and other people, he says that a combination of us rejecting absolute moral standards and the omnipresence of social media has led to the rise of an entirely new moral system.

See if you resonate with this. And it's not a moral system that's based on right and wrong. It's a moral system based on inclusion and exclusion.

[27 : 56] It's a shame culture. So you have people who, you have a culture that is in a perpetual state of anxiety.

Why? Because there's an ever-shifting set of moral expectations. It's not fixed, it's not firm, and it's determined by the mob. It's determined by the masses.

And so every day you have new sources of moral outrage and indignation and causes coming across your feed. And people are frantically trying to figure out what they need to do and what they need to say and what they need to not say and what they need to not do and what groups they need to disparage and what people they need to sympathize with.

And there's a constant sense of I need to know where the locus of morality is at, you know, at 6 o'clock on this Sunday because I need to know because if I fail in some way to align myself, if the cause comes through my feed and I jump on the wrong cause, well then I will be shamed.

People will say, how could you possibly support that cause? If I'm too slow to jump on board, people will say, how could you possibly be so apathetic?

[29 : 14] Right? And so there's a constant sense of how do I align myself and it creates constant anxiety. People desperately want to be included and affirmed and they desperately fear being shamed and shunned by their online community.

So our culture may have rejected the idea of God as the judge of right and wrong, but what happens when we do that? We've all become judges. If you get rid of one judge, then you have an

innumerable array of judges.

And right now, the internet is our courtroom and people are being sentenced every day. So human beings are inescapably moral, so the real question is, what is our standard based on and what hope is there for those who fall short of that standard?

And this is where the mercy of God shines. Because in our culture, there's very little hope for people who fall short of that standard.

If you say the wrong thing or you do the wrong thing, you can be publicly shamed and it will haunt you for years. If you don't believe me, Google the name Justine Sacco and read her story.

[30 : 31] But if the God of the Bible is the only judge in history, if He's the only real judge, then that should give us tremendous hope. Because the God of the Bible is the only judge in history.

He's the only judge in any religion out there. He's the only God that you'll see anywhere in culture who not only establishes the standard, but He then fulfills it.

He not only establishes the standard, but then He fulfills it on our behalf. So what this means is that my hope is not based on what I've done. It's not based on my ability to know and to keep that standard.

It's based on the fact that Jesus came and lived the life I should have lived. Died the death I should have died. Overcame death. Destroyed that sin.

And then offered to join with me. And the Bible says that when we join with Jesus, when we become one with Him, then all of that stuff that He did, all of the ways that He kept that standard get applied to me as well.

[31 : 39] And because when I am in Him and He is in me, as the Bible says, when we are one, then I enjoy the benefits of His obedience. This union with Christ is the fundamental hope of Christianity.

Being a Christian means being so joined with Jesus that this becomes true of us. So our hope and faith is not based on what we do for God but what He has done for us. And the more we understand this, the more it actually fills us with love and gratitude and the kinds of things that motivate us to want to live and become more like Him.

So this is real mercy. It's God doing everything necessary to make us His children and give us new life, eternal inheritance, not because we deserve it but because He is merciful. So friends, this is the good news of Easter.

This is why we have real hope. Because its foundation isn't our values, our disposition, our tendency to be hopeful. It's based on the fact of the resurrection and so it's certain.

The substance of our hope is the new life, the new identity, the eternal inheritance we have through Jesus which means everything that matters is already ours. And then lastly, all of this comes not because we deserve it or have earned it but because of God's mercy.

[32 : 58] And the primary symbol that reassures us of this when we forget it is baptism. And so in a couple of minutes, in a little while, we're going to actually have some baptisms and that's going to be a lot of fun.

But for now, I'm going to pray and then we're going to join together and sing a song of response. So let's pray together. Our Father, we thank You for this hope. We know that this is not something that we are capable of generating.

It's not a force of willpower that we create. This hope is something that comes from You. So Lord, we pray that in Your mercy, in Your love, You would implant this hope in our hearts that it would generate in us the kind of hope that would shape how we live in such an anxious, disillusioned world that we might become, as Your people, beacons that point to this hope and lead others to it. And we pray this in Your Son's holy name. Amen.