

Searching for Hope

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[0:00] So, over the last four or five years, if you go and look at the most searched words on Google, consistently across the board for the last five or six years, one of the top searches is a search for the word hope.

Hope is searched for more than how to make money quickly. It's searched for more than home renovation ideas. It's searched for more than just about anything consistently across the board. People are searching for hope.

And to the extent that Google is a reflection of our collective consciousness, it seems as though a lot of people are not okay. It seems as though a lot of people are looking for something to hold on to, something to grab on to, something to build their life on.

And traditionally, people look to a variety of things for this. People have looked traditionally to institutions, such as our government or the criminal justice system or news media outlets, the university, the institutional church, to provide that security.

Other people have looked to science and technology, believing that science and technology were gradually going to make the world a better place and make us better people. People have looked to financial security to secure their future, to protect the future generations of their family.

[1:25] People have even started to look within. The sense that if I can figure out who I really am on the inside, if I can define myself, I'm finally going to be at peace.

And yet, over the last few years, all of these places that people traditionally look for hope have let us down collectively in one way or another.

They fail. They mislead. They fail to deliver what they promise. And so, people are searching for hope. And when those things that you traditionally rely on start to crumble, you're left asking this deeper question, which is, is there anything out there that I can actually build my life on?

Is there anything that can bear the weight of the world that we live in? Because when things stop making sense, people start looking for meaning. Is there any meaning to any of this? Anything to build our life on?

And this is the question that Easter answers, not only for us, but for the world. And this passage that we just heard read from 1 Peter 1, Paul is speaking to people very much like us.

[2:33] People who, the things they thought they could rely on have crumbled, and they are looking for something to build their life on. They're looking for some source of hope that can't be taken away. And so, Peter wants to give them something solid, and he points them to one thing, which is the hope of Easter.

It's the only hope strong enough to carry the weight of the world that we live in. And Easter hope is unlike other forms of hope. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. Easter hope is unique, and we're going to look at a few reasons why it's unique.

Let's pray, and then we'll get started. Lord, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for Easter. And we thank you that because of Easter, we're not just here considering dead words on dead pages from dead people from long, long ago.

That, in fact, we're here to listen to and receive the voice and the words of the living God. Lord, we're here because you're here, and you're the one we need to hear from this morning.

So, we pray that in your grace and the power of your spirit, we would do just that. In your son's name we pray. Amen. So, Easter hope is unlike other forms of hope.

[3:48] And the first reason is this. It's because Easter hope is not simply wishing. It's not simply wishful thinking. It's actually waiting on something.

And those are two very different categories. And I say this because typically people think of hope, any form of hope, is a kind of wishful thinking. You know, I'm driving downtown this afternoon, and I'm just hoping that I'll find a parking spot.

It's kind of, you're wishing, hoping that the parking gods will be kind to you. You're applying to college, some of you are applying to colleges, and you're hoping that you get in.

You know, it's a synonymous thing, I wish they would accept me in this college. Or you're calling your doctor, and you're hoping it's good news and not bad news.

And it feels like you're wishing. You're just, it's a form of wishful thinking. And so, most people, when you say the word hope, it's like I'm going to cross my fingers, and I'm going to hope really hard that this thing happens.

[4:47] That the good thing happens, or the bad thing doesn't happen. So, it's easy because of that to think of hope kind of like a personality trait. Like some people are just naturally hardwired to be more hopeful because they're just naturally more optimistic.

It's like I know so and so, and they're just a hopeful person. They always have hope, and I'm just not like that. I'm a cynic. I'm a pessimist. I'm just not as hopeful. Easter hope is something categorically different from any of these other kinds of hope.

It's not wishing at all. It's actually waiting. Peter says that because of the resurrection, Christians have been born again, in verse 4, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

And when he uses the word inheritance, what he means is this. He says, there's a future that is waiting for you. There's a future that is waiting for you where nothing that you love will ever be taken away from you.

There's a future waiting for you where you're going to live life free from sin and death. It's no longer even going to be on your radar. There's a future waiting for you where you're going to experience a kind of joy that doesn't fade.

[6:04] It doesn't ebb and flow. There's a future waiting for you where you're going to live in a world that has been made whole, and you will be made whole. That's what he's saying.

It's a place of absolute security and contentment with God. So, what he's saying in context is that when someone comes to Jesus and they repent and they put their faith in him, God adopts you. God makes you his child, and then he effectively writes you into his will. Now that you're adopted, you're written into the will, and that future that we just described becomes your inheritance.

It is secured for you. It's yours to claim. So, it's not something that you wish might happen. Right? You're not sitting there saying, man, I hope things work out, and I hope it's like that one day.

God says, no, no, no. Your name is in the will. It's already yours. It's going to happen. It's just a matter of time. And so, what Peter is beginning to tell us is that if you build your life on that, if you know that, and if you build your life on it, you can endure whatever hardship comes your way in this present moment.

[7:20] In verse 6, Peter says, in all this, listen, you greatly rejoice. Though now for a little while, now he's encapsulating all of the suffering we face in this life.

Though now for a little while, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. He's not minimizing the suffering that he's addressing.

He's putting it in perspective. He's putting the suffering in perspective. Imagine somebody told you, all the suffering and hardship that you're experiencing right now, it's all going to be over in one week.

And after that, it's going to be smooth sailing. You just have to get through this week. I think most of us could probably endure almost anything if we knew that it was going to be over in a week. And what he's saying is, in the perspective of eternity, everything that we face right now is just the slightest blip.

It's a prologue to what we will one day enjoy. So, this is how women endure the immense pain of childbirth.

[8:26] It's because they know that in this present moment, I'm suffering, but they know what waits on the other end of that suffering. They know that suffering is going to end, and there's going to be the even greater joy of a new child in my life.

And it enables you to endure almost anything. So, everything we have to endure in this life is just the prologue. So, for those of us who are here who are Christians, the question is simply, do we know this?

Do we understand it? Do we understand what it means? I just read a story about a woman from Oregon. I think she was in Portland.

And she lived her entire adult life on the streets. And so, she lived on the streets of Portland, and she died homeless. And that's tragedy enough, right?

Somebody living their life on the streets, somebody dying homeless and destitute. But here, the real tragedy of the story is this. Her entire adult life that she was living on the streets, she actually had an inheritance waiting for her.

[9:28] Her mother passed away and left her close to \$1 million. But the authorities couldn't find her. They looked for her everywhere. And so, the money was just sitting there.

It was already hers. She just needed to come claim it. But she had no idea it was there. And nobody could find her to tell her. So, she lived and then she died as if she had nothing.

When she had this inheritance waiting for her all along. And you know, when I read this story, I immediately thought, I think that's how many of us live spiritually. I think many of us live that way. We live as though we have nothing. We live as though there is no inheritance. You know, our inheritance, if you think about it, inheritance as I've just described it, that means that we have a secure future that is imperishable and undefiled and unfading.

So, why do we spend so much time worrying about our future? Right? Why do we live as if everything could fall apart at any moment? Our inheritance means that one day we're going to be fully known, fully loved, fully accepted.

[10:37] Right? One day you're going to know what it's like to be fully loved, fully known, fully accepted. Why do we lay awake at night replaying conversations in our minds, worrying about what this random person or that random person thinks of us?

Why did I say that? That was so stupid. Why didn't I say this? They probably think this about me. They probably think that about me. If we know that we have this inheritance, why do we live like we don't?

Our inheritance means that one day nothing that we love will ever be taken away from us. And yet we have this tendency to cling to what we have and to try to accumulate more as though this is all there is.

And if we're not really, really, really careful, it could all be taken away from us and we'll never have anything again. So, the question that I think we need to ask is how would it change our lives if we started living out of the certainty of our inheritance in Christ?

I mean, just think about your life over the next few days. What would it look like for you to make decisions this week, not based out of fear, not based out of scarcity, but based out of the security of knowing that we have this inheritance in Christ?

[11:50] How would it change our priorities? How would it help us to become more generous? Would it help us to be generous with our money or our time? What risks would we be willing to take? I think if you believe this, you would be one of the biggest risk takers of anybody that you know.

So, Easter hope is not wishing. It's not wishful thinking. It's not I hope, I hope, I hope. It's the certainty of knowing that you have an inheritance. The only question is, are we living like that or not?

That's the first thing. In addition to this, another big difference between Easter hope and other kinds of hope is that Easter hope is not a feeling.

It's a fact. It's not a feeling. It's a fact. It's a fact. So, some of us may be hearing this and you may be thinking, well, you know, I've been a Christian a really long time and I kind of know all this, but to be honest, I don't really feel that hopeful right now in my life.

I don't feel hopeful. And I want you to hear me say this very clearly. That's okay. And it does not make you a bad Christian. And it does not call your faith into doubt.

[12:58] If you don't feel hopeful, that is perfectly okay. Because Easter hope really is not a feeling. It's a fact. And that's a big deal.

Peter says, God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, by definition, our hope as Christians is a living hope.

It's alive. And what does that mean? It means it exists independently from our feelings. It exists whether we feel it or not. Easter hope is not a feeling.

Easter hope is a man went into the grave and walked out again. That's Easter hope, right? Easter hope is Jesus is alive whether we feel it or not. That's Easter hope.

So, feelings come and go. They rise. They fall. A lot of times, they don't make a lot of sense. Easter hope doesn't budge. It doesn't move. It doesn't change.

[13:56] It is always there. You know, feelings are like clouds. And Easter hope is like the sun. And sometimes, your feelings can just be so dark that they blot out the sun entirely.

And you can't see it at all. And that's what feelings are like. But even if you can't see it, the sun doesn't go away. The sun is always there. It may be hidden for the moment behind those clouds, but it's not gone.

And it's the same with your feelings and then the fact of Easter. So, Easter hope means you might feel hopeless. And those feelings might cloud out your hope.

But Christ is still there. And He's still very much alive. And what this means is that you can feel hopeless and still have Easter hope at the same time. Because Jesus is a living, breathing reality who is with you and He's for you and He's in you regardless of how you feel.

So, when it comes to our feelings, if you're anything like me, most of the time we don't get to choose how we feel. I wish we did.

[15:05] But we don't get to choose how we feel. We do get to choose what we do with what we feel. Right? So, when it comes to our feelings, that's the choice we have.

Is what am I going to do with the things that I'm feeling right now? So, we do get to choose how we interpret them. We get to choose how much authority we give them. How much authority do you give your emotional world in your life?

We get to choose how we respond to our feelings. So, I'm not saying that we pretend that they're not there. No, no, no. That's a huge mistake. We should not pretend that they're not there. They are there.

They're real. They're important data points. But they also don't get to have the final word on our life. Right? Feelings are kind of like your five-year-old.

You want them in the car, but not the driver's seat. Right? They deserve a place in your life. Right? You don't want to ignore them. You don't want to, like, kick them to the curb.

[16:03] They need to be in the car because they're an important part of you. Right? But don't let them in the driver's seat. So, when it comes to our outlook, when it comes to our choices, when it comes to the direction of your life, what do you allow to sit in the driver's seat?

Is it the subjective world of your feelings where you're acting out of whatever you might feel in the moment? Or is it the objective fact of the resurrection?

So, the question is this. What about the next time you're feeling hopeless, the next time you're feeling depressed or anxious? What if you respond this way? What if you're feeling down?

You're feeling down. And some of you know that over the years, I've had bouts of tremendous struggles with depression. And I know some of you have as well. And in those moments, it's really hard to know what weighs up and what weighs down.

You just sort of, it's easy to sort of lose all your orientation. What if the next time you're feeling hopeless or depressed or anxious? You take the time to notice those feelings.

[17:04] I'm feeling this way right now. You recognize that they're providing helpful data for what's going on inside. Things are not going well in here, right?

But then you sort of take a step back. And then you decide, am I going to allow this to determine the choices that I make over the next hour or day or week?

Do I put this in the driver's seat or not? If I don't put this in the driver's seat, am I going to allow the fact of the resurrection to have the final say, not these feelings?

Do I choose to put that in the driver's seat instead? So you say, what choices would I make right now if I was basing those choices on the fact that Jesus is alive rather than on how I'm feeling at this moment?

Right? Am I going to allow these clouds to pass? And you may be surprised how sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes when you make those choices based on the objective fact of the resurrection, rather than on how you're feeling in the moment, you'll be amazed at how often those feelings will then follow those choices.

[18:19] Right? If you make those choices based in faith, not in your feelings, sometimes more often than not, your feelings will sort of follow. Right? So Easter hope, friends, is not wishing, it's waiting.

And it's not a feeling, it's a fact. And then the last point that we want to make this morning is that Easter hope is different in that it's not simply a coping strategy.

It's a call to action. It's very different. This is simply a way of saying this, the point of Easter hope is not only to help us in our own struggles.

Now it does that. It does that like nothing else could. And that's important and that matters. So I don't want to belittle that. But that's not all it does. Easter hope is not just about me sitting in my own room and feeling better.

Although that's good. Easter hope is a call to action. What do we mean by that? There was a small town that had been designated as an area that was to be the site of a hydroelectric plant.

[19:28] And if you know what happens, like a small town down in a valley, they're going to put in a hydroelectric plant. It means that the plan was to dam up a river and to allow it to flood the town and to turn it into a big lake where they would build a big dam and generate power.

And so they designated this and they let the townspeople know and they created a very long timeline to give everybody the resources and the chance to relocate. So there was this period of time where everybody knew that was coming, but they gave them plenty of time to get their affairs in order and relocate and all that before they flood the town.

Here's the interesting thing that happened. In the intervening months, people were still living there. But all of a sudden, housing upkeep stopped. Community improvement ceased.

Infrastructure was just sort of let go. Basic lawn care was totally neglected. All of that came to an end. And so the town looked abandoned long before anyone actually moved away.

It already looked abandoned. And of course, the point is this, that whatever you believe about the future determines how you live in the present.

[20:39] Whatever you believe about the future determines what you're going to invest in, in the present. So if you believe that there's no God, if you believe that this world and us, that we're all just accidents, if you believe that all of this is just going to end in nothing, then ultimately nothing we do really matters.

The world doesn't really matter. And maybe you have reasons for caring about it, but there's no ultimate reason to care about it now because there's no ultimate future for it. And what we need to recognize is that Easter actually says the opposite of this.

Easter says that this world matters. It matters so much that God refused to abandon it. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection of Jesus is a preview of the resurrection of the world. And recognizing that changes how we view everything, right? At the resurrection of Jesus, things were set in motion that cannot be undone.

At the resurrection of Jesus, God loosed an arrow of redemption that even now is arcing through history toward its mark. And that mark is the renewal of all things.

[21:59] So Christians, more than anyone else in the world, should care about this world because we know where this is going.

And so I would say that Easter shows us that the Christian life is about participating in what God is already doing to renew and restore this world.

In the book, *Surprised by Hope*, the scholar, the New Testament scholar N.T. Wright puts it like this. He says, what you do in the present by painting, preaching, building, campaigning for justice, caring for the environment, will last into God's future.

Not in a simplistic way. Not in a simplistic way. God will take it up, transform it, and weave it into the new creation. Just think about that.

Just let that sink in. We fight injustice because we know that justice is coming. We care for the sick because we know that sickness is not going to win.

[23:04] We care for the environment because we know that God is going to renew and restore all things. It's because a resurrected Jesus promises a resurrected world.

And God calls His people to share in bringing that renewal about. This is extremely important because it motivates and animates everything we do in this world as Christians.

So I want to pull all this together. We have entered, friends, into a new era in the life of our church. It's so great to say that because for a long time we were saying, we're on the cusp.

We're, it's going to happen. One day. Only the Lord knows the day and the time, right? But it's coming. And now we're here. And we've entered into this new era.

And we need to know what we're about. And we need to know what our business is. We need to know what our priorities are. We've entered into a new era in the life of our church. So we're asking what kind of community we're called to be now that God has put us here in this beautiful space, in the heart of the city, with a vision to love and serve the people of the DMV area for God's glory.

[24:13] In God's timing, wasn't my timing, thank goodness. In God's timing, we're launching in the Easter season. And one way we might think about our role in the city and our role in this neighborhood and our role in all the places that you live is that our role is to be Easter people.

And that phrase, Easter people, comes from St. Augustine of Hippo. He said this to Christians. He said, we are the Easter people. And hallelujah is our song.

And I would say that Easter people are people who are animated by the living hope of the resurrected Christ. So as we said this morning, what does that mean? It means first that we are people who are waiting on the inheritance of a secure future with God.

So we're generous, we're open handed with our time and with our money. We're willing to take risks that other people won't take because we're not controlled by fear or scarcity. That's being an Easter person.

Being an Easter person means that we're always able to remain hopeful no matter what happens. Because we've built our lives on the fact of the resurrection rather than the feelings of the moment.

[25:25] And finally, Easter people are people who care about this world. They care about this city. They care about the neighborhoods where we live. They care about the places where we work.

Because we know that God is already bringing renewal. And the purpose of our lives is to share in that work. So friends, may we be Easter people.

May we be known in this city for the hope we bring. The hope we bring. The hope we embody because of the risen Christ. Let's pray.

Lord, this will only be true because of you and through you. Thank you. We praise you. As we're reminded again and again, it's only because you live that we can live.

Lord, that it's out of your life that we're able to offer life. Lord, as we continue in our worship of you and as we prepare to come around your table and receive your life into us, Lord.

[26:23] We pray that these truths would become flesh in our hearts, just as you have become flesh. We pray this in your son's holy name, Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.