

Resurrection Hope: Unity in Him

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 April 2023

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] So good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, April 30th. And as you all know, people tune in to the phone line or listen on the podcast, which seems to be gradually creeping up in listenership, which is nice.

Or obviously you're here in person, so you get the benefit of what that experience is like and interacting in person. So this morning we're concluding our sermon series called Resurrecting Hope.

Good reflexes for an old guy, hey? Wow. Our series is called Resurrecting Hope. And so through this series, we've been learning that the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us the power to face the difficult things that come our way.

And it's because Jesus overcame death and the grave that there's nothing we could possibly come up against that we can't handle with Jesus at our side.

His resurrection, as we've talked about in this series, it was a shock to Mary Magdalene, right? As we remember. She came to the tomb that first Easter morning, but she was filled with hope to know that Jesus was alive.

[1 : 15] She met him face to face. Peter was restored in relationship with Jesus after he denied him. Jesus' power and sacrifice, Jesus' love and his grace overcame all of Peter's failures.

And then last week, we found hope in the fact that Jesus wept at the death of his friend Lazarus. We discovered and learned and were reminded that when we experience pain and grief in our lives, Jesus feels that pain.

And he also has the power to heal that pain. All of our pain. And all of this should give, I hope, give us a sense of resurrected hope for all of our lives, for every aspect of our life.

And when we started this series, we talked about the fact that Easter cannot, should not, must not be a one-day event. What happened at Easter, the resurrection of Christ, must change our lives.

Or it changed nothing. Often, as someone is getting close to the end of their life and they reflect back, I don't think they tend to reflect on how many more vacations they wish they had.

[2 : 34] Or the big TV that they wish they had bought. Or maybe they're sad that about a book or a blog, these days, a blog.

Blog is even old terminology now. But something that they didn't write. You know, oh, I wanted to write that Western. And I never did get around to it. I'm not writing a Western just in case anyone's worried.

But maybe sometimes that happens. Maybe sometimes regret shows up in that way. But regret, I find, I have found, I tend to think, takes a different form. I believe people tend to reflect on wishing they'd spent or had more time with their families.

How they wish that a broken relationship could have been restored. How they would have spent more time helping people, perhaps. I've shared this with you in the past.

And I think my greatest regret, I'm not dying, by the way. But my greatest regret when someone in my life has passed and I've had those conversations near the end.

[3 : 40] It has been a conversation of, oh, if I just had a little more time. If I could have had one more hug with my parents. If I could have had one more conversation. And I'll get that again one day.

But for now, it feels sad. It feels empty, right? And I think those are the kinds of conversations that people tend to focus on. And I hope we all recognize that those ones truly matter most.

When people recognize that they are truly, literally running out of time. I believe people generally tend to become more open. More vulnerable, more honest.

They speak from the heart. And it's people's final words, I believe, that tend to reflect the things that are, good or bad, most important to them.

So as Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time, his disciples are with him. Jews from all over the world would have flooded the area to celebrate the festival of Passover.

[4 : 49] They would have shared a Passover meal to commemorate how God rescued his people from slavery in Israel. In Egypt, sorry. In Israel. Jesus and his disciples find themselves eating the last supper together.

He washes the disciples' feet. And then the Gospels record Jesus' final prayer. These are some of the last words before his death. And a few years ago, I did a series that you might remember called Famous Last Words.

And we talked about the last words of Christ from the cross. But these words at the Last Supper, I believe they reflect the things that mattered most to Jesus in many ways.

And John 17 records this entire prayer. And I encourage you to read it yourself. But we're going to focus in on a specific part of the prayer that we read in John 17, 20 to 26.

So you can grab a Bible in front of you or turn it on, as my former pastor used to say. Switch your Bible on and I will read it for us as well so you can follow along.

[5 : 56] My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. And all of them, sorry, that all of them may be one.

Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.

I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am. And to see my glory. The glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Righteous Father, Jesus says. Though the world does not know you, I know you. And they know that you have sent me. I have made you known and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them.

[7 : 16] And that I myself may be in them. As he prays in John 17, Jesus prays for a blessing over his ministry.

He prays for protection for his disciples and power through God's word. And many scholars and theologians refer to these verses as the priestly prayer of Christ.

Jesus. So in verses 20 to 23, as I covered in the end there, Jesus turns his attention towards, maybe you recognized it, his believers and also his followers.

And it's important to note, this is really, really cool. Maybe you noticed. It's important to note that the prayer isn't just for those who are currently following him.

Did you catch that in there? Jesus is also praying into the future for anyone who would decide to believe and follow him in the days ahead.

[8 : 19] That's powerful, powerful stuff. So this prayer isn't just, it is for Peter, James, and John, but not just for them. This prayer is for you, all of you, and it's for me.

Jesus prays that they and we would be united, unified, one, just as he and the Father are one. My friends, we are united by God's love.

So the world we live in is incredibly fractured and divided. We saw it before COVID. We certainly saw it during COVID. We even see the aftershocks of it now.

And it's not even related solely to the pandemic. Our world is fractured and divided, isn't it? We're fractured along social and political lines. People we will interact with and we won't.

People who believe things that are different from what we believe. We're fractured along theological lines. I explained to a friend of mine who's Catholic. She didn't understand what Protestant was per se.

[9 : 28] And I said, think of an umbrella. The umbrella is Christianity. And she said, no, the umbrella is them. And I said, no, it's not. I said, the umbrella is Christianity. Catholicism and Protestantism are under that umbrella.

So if you claim Jesus Christ as your risen Savior and Lord, and I do, and I identify as Protestant, and you identify as Catholic, we are still brothers and sisters in, under, Christ.

But then she said, well, why is there only maybe Catholic, and there's Eastern Orthodox, and there's maybe a handful on one side? And I said, oh, here we go. And she said, why are there so many Protestant denominations?

And I said, well, I said, Jesus made it simple. Love God, love others, follow me. Take up your cross. That's it.

It's simple. I said, you know who Billy Graham is? And she said, oh, yeah. And I said, Billy Graham kept it simple. We, everyone else, made it complicated.

[10:30] So you like hymns. I like choruses. Split. You like to read out of the Bible. I like it on the screen. Yeah, I need to go there versus here. I prefer sitting over standing.

Yeah, that's not good. Hymns. Yeah, hymns are screened. King James. ESV. Different translation. Yeah, we can't fellowship together.

See that? Those fractures, even on theological and belief lines. It's tragic. It is completely tragic. And sometimes I think we're often, as human beings, looking for a good reason to get into an argument, right?

A good reason to disagree with someone else. Something that then creates further separation and division. And as human beings, I think we have a natural tendency to assert an us versus them kind of perspective.

Maybe you can recognize that in your own worldview, in your own understanding of things. The Bible says it was because of God's great love for the world that he sent his only son.

[11:38] God loves every human being on the earth. God loved every human being that was on the earth and is yet to come to the earth.

God loves every human being on the earth. There's no one who's beyond or excluded from the love of the Father. Can you recognize that? We may tend to exclude.

We may tend to ignore, disassociate. But that's not how God operates. Jesus came to unite our divisions and heal the fractures.

Jesus' mission and his intent is clear in this prayer. He came to unite us under God's love so that then we can be united together and with Jesus.

We can be one, just as Jesus is one with God. That's the standard. The unity that Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit have as the Trinity, that's the relationship that God wants us to have with one another.

[12:50] In late Pastor A.W. Tozer's book, *The Pursuit of God*, and we're going to put this quote up. You probably can't read it, but I wanted it all on one slide, so I'll read it. Has it ever occurred to you that 100 pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other?

They're of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard, to each one must individually bow. So 100 worshipers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become unity conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

A little complicated. Tozer has dense language at times. What he's really saying there is by focusing on God, our relationship with God and our closeness to God will naturally attune us to being close to one another if we seek God as individuals will be drawn closer together to him through community.

So rather than seeking to be tighter and closer and more unified as a body of believers, if we all tune to the original source, we'll naturally be drawn together.

And to me, that's a really powerful way of what unity looks like. Now, not everyone knows what a tuning fork some people don't even know what a piano is.

[14:25] Haven't ever touched one. Maybe that keys you up, just that conversation. Come on. Thank you. But we need to recognize that unity is not the same as uniformity.

Do you know the difference there? Being unified is not the same as being exactly the same as someone else. The resurrection hope of the world doesn't depend on every Christian looking and acting like carbon copies.

Perhaps you've heard before, if Jesus wanted us to be rule-following robots, if God wanted that, he would have made us that way. He could have, but that's not what he wanted.

That was not the plan. He's looking for us to be unified together, but not in our differences, not in our sameness. So just like black and white keys are tuned to different notes, we're intended to work in concert with one another, there's a pun intended there, because of that unifying factor of God at

work in our lives, our relationship with God as our tuning fork.

So what Jesus is praying for in his priestly prayer is that every Christian, worldwide and through history, would allow their hearts to be tuned to God himself.

[15:54] That's what Jesus is asking the Father to do here. So that in the middle of our differences, in the middle of our uniqueness and individuality with which God has given us and created us, we can also be unified in our love for him.

Does that make sense? God doesn't want us to be all the same. He wants us to be unified, but also individually in the way we're created. So what would be the purpose of that?

Well, we need to remember that God's love for us isn't only for us as individuals. God loves the world, right?

And we are within that. His love for each and every person is what we're talking about here. And that unity that Jesus prays for is also meant to be a beacon of hope to a world that is watching. So that for anyone who is far from God, when they witness the love between his followers, they say, oh man, I want that. They become drawn to the source of that love, the source that we have become attuned to, God himself.

[17:14] We need to fight for unity. To me, it's a bit heartbreaking, actually, to read Jesus' final prayer and then recognizing what he cared for most, what he desired most, and then think about the current state of his church.

As I talked about the fractures that we see, I'm afraid that too often we've decided to focus on all the ways that we are different.

We've begun to focus on the ways that we are at odds with one another. And Tim, as I prepared this sermon, I got thinking, this is not just in a church, this is in churches, this is in denominations, this is across the body of Christ.

And I think it's breaking Jesus' heart. We have far more in common than not. The truth is that living your life for God, out of love for God, and out of love for people is no easy task.

Did you think I was going to say it was? Well, all you got to do is these five things. There's two listed in Genesis, three in 1 Peter, and one in Revelation.

[18:39] Not that easy. people will make you angry. Fair? People will hurt you.

People will disappoint you. They will offend you. But as Christians, we must strive to live in unity with each other.

We must literally fight for unity because that's what Jesus wanted. We're going to look at Ephesians 4, verses 1 to 6, so you can hop over there.

And this is where Paul speaks to the struggle of remaining humble. The struggle of remaining gentle and patient in our relationships with one another. Paul says in Ephesians 4, 1 to 6, As a prisoner for the Lord then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

[19:50] there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

in verse 3, Paul says that we're to make every effort to keep the unity of peace that's been given to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

We must seek to follow the example that Jesus demonstrated throughout his entire life. Friends, we must seek to be humble.

We must seek to be kind and patient with one another. Paul even gives the big reason why. The reason we're to seek to be these things, seek to be humble with one another and be kind to one another is because we have been given one Spirit.

We share this. We are part of one body and under Christ we have one hope. We share all of these things in common.

[21:05] So much greater, so much greater than any differences we could ever have. And I believe that when we fail to fight for unity within the church it can become so easy for it to slide into an us versus them kind of situation.

And I grieve that so much. We lose sight of the bigger picture. We talked a bit about the bigger picture last Sunday. We lose sight of the bigger picture and get caught up in the minutiae, the fine details of what we perceive to be our rights.

There's a hot button for me. As a follower of Jesus, are you concerned? I'm sidetracking and that's fine. As a follower of Jesus, do you recognize you are concerned about your rights versus someone else's rights?

Having a body, whether it's a church or political leaders dictate what you perceive to be your rights or suggest something that is counter to what you believe your rights are.

When Jesus said, follow me, did you forget to put your rights down to make room for carrying your cross?

[22 : 29] When we're not careful, if we're not careful, I believe the individuals on the other side of the argument or the conversation, we try to minimize the tension by not saying argument, they become enemies and we begin to forget that they have intrinsic value just as we do.

When we take our eyes off of Jesus and away from his example, how easily do we forget what Jesus prayed for for his disciples?

Friends, he prayed for all of us. He didn't say, these ones are right and I'm praying for them and these ones either figure it out or they don't. He prayed for all of us.

And when Jesus sacrificed his life on, I made myself cry last Sunday, that cross, he did it for all of us. so the fractures and the factions that we see in our lives, in our churches, in our denominations, in the body of Christ, it's not meant to be there.

In verse 6, Paul says that there is one God and Father over all and that he is in all and through all. And that's including the church member that sits over there that you don't agree with, maybe you don't like.

[23 : 56] For us as pastors, it means the pastor at another church that we maybe don't like to hang around with at the denominational gathering who their theology we maybe don't align with, Jesus prayed for them too.

We're meant to be in the same body. And I believe we can, this is a cliché, but we can do more together than we ever can do apart.

And you wondered if this would come out and it's gotta. So, as a team, a team becomes the sum of its parts, does it not?

A team becomes not a group of individuals playing towards a goal, no pun intended, not a group of individuals all playing in the same direction, but people who play for each other, with each other, with a common goal.

As followers of Jesus, do we not have a common goal? Have you ever stopped to think about the fact that God's mission could have been accomplished accomplished by Jesus all on his own?

[25 : 19] Ever think about that? One of the most astonishing things about our faith is that Jesus invited us, sinful and broken, just like you and me, to join him on his rescue mission for the world.

He didn't say, well, here's the job posting, yeah, you don't really fit. He said, follow me and we'll figure it out. Follow me and you'll grow.

Follow me and I will change your heart. Jesus had 12 ordinary men who bought into the idea that heaven could be brought to earth.

He didn't have to, but Jesus chose them to carry out the plan of God. to be the first ones. And that was always the plan because Jesus knew that they could accomplish far more together than they could ever do on their own.

My friends, when God's people work together in love, it brings hope to the world. I truly believe that. Just as on our own, we don't always have much to offer, we're fragile, we're broken, but united, something truly special happens when we unite under the banner of our love for God and allow that to motivate us towards changing the world.

[27 : 00] A common message that's used in the scriptures to describe what unity in Christ looks like is the human body. body. And there's many analogies and metaphors used, but Paul elaborates on this just a few verses later from what we touched on in Ephesians.

So I'll just read this for you. The words of Ephesians 4, verse 16. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Paul compares the church to a body with many parts. Hands are connected to arms and arms to torsos because of ligaments and joints.

And all of these individual pieces are then built up with love. And then it's in that they're able to accomplish a great work together. As a church family in this place specifically, we have responded

to God's prompting to step up for others within and connected to our church family. But also for people around the world who have needed us, have needed someone to step forward. My friends, God will use us when we submit to his will and ask him to use us.

[28 : 28] That's the scary part. You ever prayed that? Lord, use me. Hang on, he will. I dare you. In fact, as your pastor, I dare you to pray and ask God to use you and watch. So who are the people in your mind that you've written off as different from you? Too different to live in unity with? Names and faces come to mind because they do for me. So what if together we recognize that we could be part of the answer to Jesus' prayer with his disciples? Friends, we can choose to be one, just as Jesus and the Father are one. And when we choose to do this, we just might see the whole world transformed.

transformed. Because ultimately Jesus is the hope, the only hope, the true hope for the world. And we can live our lives with confidence, trust, and faith only because of him.

[29 : 44] So put your faith in Jesus today. Sounds like an altar call, sounds like a very old pastor thing to say, but I mean it. Put your faith in Jesus today, whether it's for the thousandth time or for the first time.

Because he alone is worthy.