

Resurrection – Real hope

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: 17 April 2022

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] And now let's continue to read in Luke 24, where we left off at verse 28, and we'll read to the end of the chapter. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. But they urged him strongly, stay with us, for it is nearly evening, the day is almost over. So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us? They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.

There they found the eleven and those with them assembled together and saying, it is true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon. Then the two told what happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, peace be with you. They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, why are you troubled? And why do doubts rise in your minds?

Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see. A ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet, and while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, do you have anything here to eat? They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, this is what I told you, while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures.

He told them, this is what is written. The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. So as we finish off the journey to Easter, we come to the resurrection, and our question for today is why does the resurrection matter?

But let's begin by recognizing that sometimes it's small words that are said to us that have the biggest impact on our lives and give us the greatest joy. Small, simple, you passed the exam. You got the job.

[3 : 1 6] Someone says, I love you. Someone says, I do. There are many examples of small words that change our lives, but there are none as significant as the words of the angels there in verse 6. He is not here. He is risen.

Those words and the reality of those words change the world. They change eternal destinies, and they can change our lives too. And that's the testimony of God's people since the very beginning. I read this week the testimony of a guy called Michael Green, who was a significant evangelist in the Church of England, died a couple of years ago, and he spoke of being in a school assembly at the age of 16 when someone came to give a talk to his high school, and it was the editor of the British Medical Journal. So a very well-respected surgeon in Bristol, editor of the BMJ, and he came and he said to these high school children, Jesus is risen. He is alive. You can know him. And Michael Green, who up until this point had kind of pushed Christianity to one side as not being very credible, thought, well, if this significant surgeon believes it, then I'm going to research it.

And as he came to research and he came to believe it was true, he gave his life to telling people the good news that Jesus indeed is alive. And that's been the reality for over 2,000 years. God's people have lived and died trusting in and testifying to the reality that Jesus is risen. That just as he had promised, the greatest of all miracles, the miracle of resurrection took place that first Easter Sunday, that the heart of Jesus, which had stopped there on the cross on Friday, began pumping again.

That his organs began functioning. That his muscles and sinews activated and Jesus was no longer dead. He is alive. And in that reality, he gives hope to his people of eternal life and eternal love.

[5 : 29] That's what we're going to think about today. And we're going to use Luke chapter 24 to make the case for the real Easter. So we're going to think about real history. And we're going to very briefly explore the evidence. And again, let me direct you to our books if you want to do some more reading.

But it's significant that everybody from the most positive Christian scholar to the most negative of historians will testify along the lines of this secular historian called Theodore Momen, that the resurrection is the best attested fact in ancient history. So we need to consider it.

And after that, we're going to think about real promise. To see that Jesus fulfills both his own predictions and the great promises that we find in the Old Testament. And we're going to move from there to think about the real hope that we find in the reality of Easter. The life-changing significance we find because Jesus is not dead. He is alive. With the goal that these seven small words of the angels, he is not here, he is risen, that they would change our lives forever, lead us to worship and joy today and forever. So let's begin by thinking about the real history that we find here.

A quote to help us on our way, Darrell Bock, a New Testament scholar, says, the resurrection was not created by the church, not an invention. Rather, the church was created by the resurrection. And I hope we'll see that the resurrection changed hearts and lives on that first Easter Sunday and still does. Luke 24 helps us to build a case for the resurrection because we find in this chapter three facts that virtually every scholar will agree on. So Christian scholars, atheistic scholars, critical scholars, will all agree on three key truths. One, Jesus was crucified. And we'll see that. Two, that the tomb was empty. And we'll see that. And thirdly, that the disciples claimed and believed that they saw the risen Lord Jesus. And we'll see that in our text as well.

So let's begin by thinking once again about the reality that Jesus was crucified. That takes us to verse one and to these women who arrive early in the morning with spices they have prepared.

[8 : 10] Why do they come to the tomb that first Easter Sunday? They are mourning and they come to anoint the dead body of Jesus. So they think. They were there and they saw him die.

In verse 20. There you go. He may be back. Verse 20. We find the disciples on the road to Emmaus giving us further confidence in the reality of Jesus being crucified. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death and they crucified him.

So Jews and Romans conspired together and were involved in a very public execution. And if you were to go to Jewish and Roman historical sources from the period, you would find they both agree Jesus really was executed. The Romans knew what they were doing. So he died.

And further evidence to Jesus being crucified, we find in verse 39, Jesus' own words to his troubled, doubting disciples, look at my hands and my feet. Why are they invited to look there?

Because the risen body of the Lord Jesus still bears the scars of sacrifice. Jesus really died and he died for our sin.

[9 : 49] Second piece of historical evidence, the tomb really was empty. So let's go back to the women. Verse 2. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

It's been pointed out many times that it's significant that women are the first eyewitnesses both to the empty tomb and to the reality of the resurrection. It gives the gospel accounts the ring of truth. When we recognize that in Jewish law at the time, women were considered on the level of children so their testimony was not accepted in a court of law. Therefore, it's highly unlikely that you would invent this story and make women the first eyewitnesses.

It's also important for us to remember that when these women come to the tomb, they're coming to a place where both Jews, Romans, disciples, they all know this is where Jesus' body was laid.

Friends and enemies know public execution, public burial in the tomb of a very prominent man by the name of Joseph. So here's why that's significant. So some people tell the story, well, maybe the disciples just went to the wrong tomb. They got the wrong address. Well, wouldn't that be so easy

as the disciples start saying Jesus is alive for the enemies of Jesus to say, well, actually they went to the wrong tomb.

Here's the right tomb and here's the dead body. But they can't do that because they know as well as the disciples, the tomb really is empty. But what's really important for us to recognize too about the empty tomb, that it by itself is not enough to make the disciples believers. And we see this in verses 11 and 12. Because here is the women coming back to the disciples to report what they've seen.

And we're told, but they did not believe the women because their words seem to them like nonsense. Again, if you're looking for a ring of truth, are these gospels well written? Well, here's another thing. There's embarrassing details all through the gospels. This isn't something that you would put into a made-up story. Here are the followers of Jesus. They've heard him say many times that he would rise. They hear the report of the empty tomb. They think it's nonsense. Remind us, these disciples are not sort of gullible people, not naive people. Like us, they know dead people stay dead. They're not on the edge of belief, just needing a simple nudge to dive in. They're not expecting Jesus to rise, and they will not believe until they see him. You come to the two on the road to Emmaus, verse 22 to 24. What becomes clear is that the news has spread. So they're talking with Jesus.

[12:40] Jesus appears to them, but they don't reckon. The women went, and they found the tomb empty, and then Peter went, and he found the tomb empty. But what you don't find is that those disciples are full of joy and worship, because for them too, there will be no living faith without a living, risen Lord Jesus that they see for themselves. And so it's interesting that Luke records the fact of the empty tomb, but it also records the very honest reactions of these first followers of Jesus.

They need to see him in order to worship. But to borrow from Michael Grant, who was an Edinburgh Uni history professor back in the 70s, he wrote a book having examined the Gospels, and he said, the evidence is firm and plausible enough to conclude the tomb was indeed found empty.

Now onto our last piece of historical evidence, and it's this. It's the disciples claimed and believed that they saw the risen Lord Jesus. Now this isn't something that's just restricted to the Bible, so we find this clearly in the Bible. But even skeptical scholars are forced to agree. So you've got people like Bart Ehrman, who'd be a very liberal, skeptical scholar. They have to agree that the disciples are transformed around Easter Sunday. And so scholars say, well, something had to have happened to move these disciples from fear to faith, and from worry to worship, from them hiding away in a corner to boldly facing death, declaring Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is alive. Something happened.

And so everybody is thinking, well, what makes the most sense for that transformation? And what we have in the Gospel is that Jesus appeared risen and alive. So again, as we think about what happens to these two men, Cleopas and the other, as they've been journeying with Jesus, he's been talking with them, then they reach Emmaus and they ask him to stay over and to stay for dinner.

And in verse 30 to 32, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, began to give it to them. And then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. So all of a sudden they realized the man they've been talking to is none other than the Lord Jesus. And it's wonderful as they recognize, here's the reason why our hearts were burning with joy.

[15:27] It's because we were talking with the Lord and he was telling us the whole Bible was testifying to him. And then you get to verses 33 and 34. So these men in Emmaus, they then run a few miles back to Jerusalem when they arrive. There's the 11 and there's other, and they're all gathered together and they too are announcing, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon. So we're beginning to get eyewitness accounts of the resurrection. And then more wonderful still, as they're talking, verse 36 onwards, Jesus himself appears. And again, this part of the story really has the ring of truth because you get more details that embarrass, we'd embarrass these first disciples. You wouldn't make this up as they see Jesus is peace, be with them. What happens? Verse 37, they're startled and frightened. They think he's a ghost.

And it takes for them looking at Jesus' hands and feet, touching him, and then watching him eat a piece of boiled fish before amazement and joy and belief and worship come. And what follows is that these fearful, doubtful disciples are then called, in verse 48, to be Jesus' witnesses to the world, to tell about these events, to tell about the reality that sin can be forgiven because Jesus died and rose again. And what we find in Luke's second book, the book of Acts, we find them bold and

courageous, ready to live and die for the Lord Jesus. And again, the question everybody needs to ask is, what brings that change? What accounts for that transformation in the disciples? Or in someone like the apostle Paul, who goes from being a Jesus hater wanting to destroy the church, to living and dying, declaring Jesus as Lord? And the best answer is that they saw him alive. It truly is the case that the resurrection created the church. And there is history to give us confidence in what the gospels record. But we need to move beyond the real history to think about the real promise contained within the resurrection. So it is clear, as we've read Luke 24, nobody saw this coming. There was lots of expectations for the Messiah, but they thought the Messiah, God's chosen king, he would come with glory. Nobody was expecting a suffering and dying Messiah. And so Luke records for us confusion and sadness and doubt and grief, which turns to joy instantly. And again, we need to ask, why was that? How can they believe that this man who died on Good Friday, how can they believe he is God's chosen king and savior? And the best answer, again, is that he is risen. And we're reminded in Luke 24 that he is risen just as was promised. Promised by Jesus, promised by God's word. The repeated testimony of Jesus himself was that the events of Easter were planned and predicted and part of God's plan of salvation. That the events of Easter can be found in the Old Testament. [19:15] So that we are to understand that the cross is not the end of the story for Jesus, rather with the resurrection. It's a new beginning for Jesus and his church. There's a pastor in Ireland called Davy Ellison, and he says the first Easter was supernatural, but it shouldn't have been a surprise.

Now, how do we see that in our text? How do we see it's a work of God, but it shouldn't have been a surprise to the disciples? Well, look with me at verses 5 to 7 and the words of the angels to the women. Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee, the Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again. Remember how he told you. So if you read Luke's gospel, you will find at least five places where Jesus explicitly predicts his suffering, dying, and rising. Chapter 9, 13, 17, 18, 22. And notice, too, what the angels say. He must be delivered over, must be crucified, must be raised again. That must speak to us of God's plan. This is all part of God's eternal plan of salvation, being worked out in the fullness of God's timing, and that plan of salvation centers on

Easter centers on a dying and rising Jesus. And Jesus knew that. Jesus always knew that. He knew his identity. He called himself the Son of Man, this human divine figure who comes from God with all authority, who's given glory and given rule, ruling as king forever. Jesus knows that those words in Daniel 7 are spoken of him. But he also knows that he is the servant of the Lord, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, the one who must suffer and die for the sins of his people. And so Jesus knew that before the crown of glory, he must go to the cross and suffer and die. Jesus knew that what would look like defeat, his death on the cross, would give way to the victory of the resurrection. And it's only this remarkable turnaround that has the power to transform the lives of the women in our story, the disciples in our story. And it's only that turnaround that has the power to change your life and mine as well. It's not just that we hear this from the angels, we hear this from Jesus himself. Famous words Jesus uttered on the road to Emmaus to those disciples who are so downcast. How foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

[22:43] Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

And then same as he appears to the disciples, verse 44 and 45, he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. So Jesus shows them on that first Easter Sunday in the scriptures that all of this was planned and predicted hundreds of years before it came to pass.

There's another wonderful pointer to Jesus as the divine son of God in this, that there is no other figure in history who fulfills multiple detailed prophecies.

Jesus did. You can read the Old Testament and find scores of detailed prophecies fulfilled by Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection. And so Jesus comes to these doubting disciples and he invites them to consider scripture, to realize that yes, this is a supernatural event, but if they'd even read the Old Testament, they would have seen it coming. It's interesting that the very first skeptics that Jesus faced were his very own followers. And how does he respond? He responds with a course on how to read their Bibles. He wants to show to them and to help us to see that the risen Lord Jesus

is the great unifying theme of the Bible. That the Bible tells the great story of God's redemption and central to that. The hero figure right at the heart of that story is Jesus himself, the God-man who died on the cross for our sin and rose again for our salvation. So that the whole Bible becomes the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. The resurrection should change how he reads our Bibles. And Jesus wanted those first disciples to understand that. Often people say, it'd be wonderful if we'd have been there that first

Easter Sunday as Jesus opened the Word of God and showed how it all pointed to him. And it would be wonderful, wouldn't it? But we're invited to read the Old Testament and see how it points forward to Jesus.

[25 : 12] Jesus is the true Adam, the true Son of God. He is the Son of God who always obeyed, who always lived for the glory of God his Father. He is the true Moses, the true and greater prophet who speaks with the authority of God the Father as God the Son. Jesus is the true priest. He is the mediator.

He is the middleman between God and man because he is both fully God and fully man. He comes as the sacrifice who atones for sin, who makes peace between us and God. He is the true and better David, the true king we are looking for, God's chosen king, whoever rules for the glory of God. Jesus is the redeemer that Job in the Old Testament was hoping for. Because Jesus lives, Job will see God face to face.

Jesus is the focus of Isaiah's prophecy in chapters 25 to 27. Because of Jesus' resurrection, death has lost its sting. Death has been swallowed up in victory. Tears are wiped away. Eternal life belongs to the people of God because Jesus is alive. And all of this told in the Old Testament. And that's significant for us. For these first disciples, it was very much the case that seeing was believing. The empty tomb wasn't enough. They needed to see the risen Lord Jesus. For us, reading is believing. And that's okay. You know, when we think about our business dealings or legal dealings, official documents, we often find ourselves asking, can I have that in black and white? We want that confidence that the terms will be kept. Well, here is God's promise in black and white. He is not here. He is risen. God's plan of salvation has been accomplished through Jesus the Son. And we can trust the eyewitnesses. And we can trust all those Old Testament prophecies. And we can trust the words of Jesus himself. That we're invited to follow the evidence, to listen to those promises, so that we would trust in the risen Lord Jesus.

[27 : 54] Let's move finally to real hope that we find this first Easter Sunday. So this is the last leg of our journey to Easter series. And what we've seen, so in Luke chapter 9, verse 51, we hear that Jesus resolutely, determinedly set his face towards Jerusalem. So Jesus has been walking deliberately towards his death on the cross. And on that journey for the last few weeks, what have we seen? We've seen different responses. We've seen some have faith, while others have unbelief. And we find some mock Jesus, but others worship Jesus. Well, now on this first Easter Sunday morning, we're seeing Jesus' journey. And the power of God, his heart beats again. And he walks out of the tomb, and he appears to his followers, and lives are changed. And the question for you and me today is, what difference does the resurrection make? Not then, but now, to my life today, and to my life in the future?

In this book here, Lee Strobel asks that same question to Gary Habermas, probably still the leading expert on the evidence for the resurrection. He asked him, why is the resurrection important? And while we maybe would expect a theological or academic answer, what Habermas does is he reflects on losing his wife to cancer. And he said in that interview, if resurrection could get me through that, it can get me through anything. If there's a resurrection, there's a heaven. If Jesus was raised, my wife will be raised, my wife will be raised, and I will be someday too. Then I'll see them both.

And in that answer, he's revealing to us the power, the unique power of Christian hope. Because we have a stronger than death Savior, we have a hope that death cannot destroy.

Let me go to just two verses in our text to see real hope. First, the hope for a real rescue.

[30 : 25] And this is in verse 21. This is words of Cleopas and his friend. It says, we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. They saw him die, and when they saw him die, for them hope died. I think it's true to say that many people today feel that hope is in short supply.

Many people today in our world are living trapped, trapped in their circumstances, trapped in their past, trapped in political situations that are outside of their control. Hope is important, but hope

seems in short supply. And that was true of that first Easter Sunday. Before they recognized Jesus, we had hoped he was going to redeem Israel. But remember how their hearts burned with joy when Jesus was revealed to them, when they realized Jesus was not dead, but he was alive. Then they understood he really is God's redeemer. And we are invited to see that the way Jesus saves and rescues and redeems is by sacrifice, by dying on the cross for our sin. And the resurrection shows us that sin and guilt has been paid for and removed, that the resurrection stands as mission complete, so that by trusting in Jesus there is for us lasting hope. Perhaps we feel trapped by our past that accuses us. Guilt and shame.

Well, there is hope beyond that in the resurrection. There is lasting hope as our guilt is cancelled and as sin is forgiven. Because the risen Lord Jesus shows that the sacrifice that he made for our sin has been accepted. And there is hope too in this, that when we are united to Jesus by faith, just as he passed through death to eternal life, so too will we. We just finished that Hope Explored course in our church and the presenter of that course used the image of a tapestry. So if you imagine a rich tapestry and then a thick needle and thread that you use to weave a tapestry, we said just as the needle bursts through the tapestry, bringing the thread behind with it.

So as Jesus bursts through death to eternal life, so if we are united and we too pass from death to life, that his story becomes our story. And there is hope for us in that.

There is hope for a real rescue. But there is also hope for a real peace. Here is verse 36 again.

[33 : 41] While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them. The real, alive, physically resurrected Lord Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you.

Peace is another one of those great longings, isn't it? It's a great longing for our world as we see week after week the horror of what's happening in the Ukraine. Peace is the great longing in our hearts as we live with fear and uncertainty and sadness. And again, many of us can testify that while we long for peace, it's so hard to find. But it's what makes the promise of the risen Lord Jesus so wonderful.

Peace be with you was wonderful news for these anxious, fearful, doubtful, sad, disciples. And it's the same message of peace and hope for us today.

That we can have peace when we're trusting in Jesus because the risen Lord Jesus reconciles us to God, makes peace by his blood shed on the cross. We can have peace because we know the risen Lord Jesus is always with his people, just as he promised his disciples. We can have peace regardless of circumstance, knowing that the risen Lord Jesus will never let his people go. He promised that he will never lose any of those he came to save. There are times when we might be lonely, desperately lonely, but we will never be alone. And there is peace because the risen Lord Jesus has gone ahead to secure our paradise, our eternal place of peace. And for us to know this peace, all we need to do is turn from sin and come to him. So that announcement of the angels, he is not here, he is risen, is good news of great joy for all people. And as we've seen from Luke 24, our Christian faith, what is it based on? It's based on historical facts. Those facts that connect with God's past promises and Jesus' own words. And those facts change our present and give hope for our future.

The center of our faith is the risen Lord Jesus. He is alive and you and I, we can know him today.

And so as we consider the wonderful reality of Easter, it's a call to trust him. And it's a call to worship him. And it's a call to true joy this Easter Sunday. So let's pray about that briefly together.

[36 : 53] Lord, our God, as we have considered the reality of the resurrection and the transforming power of meeting the risen Lord Jesus, as we have seen that in him there is forgiveness of sin, there is the hope of eternal life, there is the promise of true and lasting peace.

Lord, we recognize this is a message that our world so badly needs. Lord, we continue to pray for Ukraine. We pray for a true and lasting peace to break out. And we pray for your mercy.

And we think of the many innocent people caught up in the conflict. And we think of the millions who have had to flee. Lord, have mercy. Lord, we pray that you would intervene, that you would stop the hands of wicked men who are doing so much damage. Lord, we also recognize the huge challenge in our own nation for the many who wake up today and each day cold and hungry because of fuel poverty and food poverty and rising prices. Our Lord, so many hopeless, anxious, fearful people.

Lord, we pray that the good news of peace that's found in the risen Lord Jesus would come to them.

Lord, we recognize it's not just a message for other people. It's also a message that we need to hear. That there is forgiveness from our sin and our guilt. That there is hope beyond our fear and

our present circumstances. That there is peace that can be found in Jesus through the burdens that we bear.

And so we pray for ourselves and our nation and for our world that this Easter Sunday would be a time of many hearts and lives turning to see and to acknowledge the wonderful news that Jesus is not here.

[39 : 22] He is risen just as he told us. Amen. Now we will close our time together singing the hymn that reminds us of the rule of Christ, the good news that's found in the Lamb who is on the throne. The hymn, Is He Worthy? And we'll stand and we will sing.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.