

Hope

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[0:00] Amen. Amen.

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Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. recognize that life brings with it broken hopes and promises. But there is something so powerful in the fact that the seed of hope still wants to find its way to grow, to bloom, to blossom, even through the cracks. Solomon in the book of Proverbs in the Bible said that hope deferred makes the heart sick. And we understand that too, that hope needs its goal and it needs its fulfillment. So as we gather here today, we are all at very different points in our journeys of life and maybe in our journey with hope and our experience of hope. But together we have a chance to see how hope connects with the events of that first Easter. We're going to consider

Christian hope as a journey. And we're going to do that through the lens of the disciple that we meet on the road here, this man called Cleopas. Christian writer C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, he has a very helpful chapter on Christian hope. And he uses that image of Christian hope being a journey. And it's a journey to a particular person, a journey towards God, towards Jesus.

And that journey of hope is also towards a particular place. It's towards heaven. It's towards life with God. And while that journey in our lived-in experience brings ups and downs, and we know Christian hope that we're going to be able to find out that way. And Christian hope is something that is really powerful. It's not the weak hope, you know, I wish, you know, I hope it won't rain when I go on holiday. Or I hope I'll get one more Easter egg. It's not that kind of hope. Christian hope is not also that kind of naive optimism, that hopefulness that imagines, well, somehow things will always get better. As Christians, many of us have come to know that actually things may get harder in this life. Things may not get better. But still, we have that hope, we have that hope, that fixed goal, and that person. So the Christian hope that we're going to talk about this morning is a fixed conviction. And it's a conviction because it's based on historical facts, the death and the resurrection of Jesus. And it's the hope that one day, life for us will be life in a perfect world. New creation. With our perfect Savior, the risen Lord Jesus. And that for life today, and we're going to see this in our story, even when hope seems lost, the resurrection of Jesus changes everything. So look with me, first of all, at verses 13 to 24, and this moment in Cleopas's life when hope seems lost. We can picture the scene together. Verse 13 to 14, we're told of these two followers,

[5:30] Cleopas and an unnamed companion, and they are trudging the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Their heads are down, eyes clouded by tears, reflecting on recent events in Jerusalem.

We get an insight into what's going on in Cleopas's heart in verse 21 as Jesus begins to speak to him. The sorrow of his heart revealed in three simple words, we had hoped. Past tense.

For Cleopas hope is dead and buried because he thinks Jesus is dead and buried. It's the same kind of logic that we come across in Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 15, where he will say really bluntly and directly, if Christ is not raised, Christian preaching is useless. Christian faith is useless. God, well, he's a liar because he said he would raise his son.

Sin is unforgiven. Paul will say, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people to be most pitied. Cleopas is feeling that because he doesn't know that Jesus has been raised.

His experience to live without hope is to cease to live, and without Jesus, Christian hope ceases to live. And then as they're walking towards Emmaus, verse 15 and 16, they're discussing, they're talking, and Jesus himself came up and walked with them. The risen Jesus appears. And notice this, if this was a made-up story, we would have this, I am sure. And Cleopas, when he saw the risen Jesus, he jumped for joy, and there was trumpets sounding, and there was happy laughter,

but instead, they were kept from recognizing him. Not sure why. Was that because there was tears filling their eyes?

[7:49] Was it because their despair was so great? Was it because it was God's timing, and the reality wasn't to be revealed just then? As Jesus begins his conversation with Cleopas and this other companion, we see that Cleopas, he knows all about the journey of Jesus.

He's been part of the story of Jesus, but he doesn't have the last chapter. And so he doesn't have the resolution to the story. He doesn't have the happily ever after of the journey of Jesus. And because of that, without knowing the resurrection for himself, Cleopas has no hope. And so we're being led to see that Christian hope relies on the bodily resurrection of Jesus. So we're going to listen in to what Cleopas says. And as we do so, remember this is history. Ask yourself, is this true? Or is it a lie? And if this is true, do you see how important it is to your life? Listen to what he says as Jesus asks him, what are the things you've been talking about? He says about Jesus of Nazareth, he was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. So for Cleopas, he knows Jesus is sent by God, powerful preacher. Verse 20, he knows Jesus was sentenced to death.

and was crucified. Verse 21, he knows that Jesus was his hope, the one who was going to redeem Israel.

He's heard the report in verse 21, on the third day, the women went to the tomb and they found it empty. And verse 23, he knows that there's that report of the vision of angels who declared Jesus to be risen and alive. He knows that a few days earlier, Jesus had come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, proclaimed as the king. And as Jesus entered, he performed miracles.

And when he arrived in Jerusalem, he confronted the corrupt religious leaders. And Jesus would then humble himself to wash his disciples' feet, anticipating serving them and all who trust in him by dying to wash us, not from dirt, but from sin. Jesus kept the Passover, and he showed people how it pointed to his coming sacrifice.

[10:58] Cleopas knew on the journey of Jesus, he was betrayed and beaten and sentenced to death by a Jewish and Roman conspiracy, and he was placed in a tomb.

What he needs to discover is that on the third day, he stood up and walked out, proving he is the Son of God, he is the true Messiah, he is the Savior King, he has broken the power of Satan and sin and death.

But at this point, for Cleopas, it's like the puzzle pieces don't fit together. For him, Jesus is dead. So there is no forgiveness. There is no rescue.

There is no prospect of Jesus bringing people back home to God. No wonder Cleopas is in despair. And again, his story shows us the resurrection of Jesus. It's everything.

Without it, Cleopas' hope, it lies crushed in the dusty streets of Jerusalem. God has not come to save his people.

[12:04] If Jesus is still in the tomb, our faith, our being here, it's a waste of time. And so Easter Sunday is a great time for us to ask the question, is this true?

And to understand and to appreciate that we have very good reason to believe it is true. that we can do the work of a historian, we can evaluate the available data, we can ask what's the best explanation, and we can conclude this is true.

Because whenever we read any of the gospel writers, this morning we read Luke, we are listening to the earliest eyewitness accounts. They are trustworthy.

When we put those four gospels together, we have multiple independent cross-reference reports all testifying to the same truth.

We have credible written sources within a generation of the events. And recognize too, that these records include a number of embarrassing truths, a number of inconvenient truths.

[13:22] It was embarrassing to people that Jesus came from Nazareth. The gospels are full of the lack of understanding and failure of his disciples.

It tells us that Cleopas lacked hope even though he was told that he should have had hope. Women as the first eyewitnesses was not something a first century Jewish person would make up.

Consider too, the transformation of the disciples. From running and hiding, denying Jesus as Lord, to boldly proclaiming Jesus risen and alive, right in the center of where it all happened, in Jerusalem itself.

Willing to suffer and die with hope. Consider the reality that we don't talk about the death of Christianity, but we've seen the explosive life of Christianity for the last 2,000 years.

The best explanation is that the resurrection actually happened. That these appearances recorded in the gospels actually took place.

[14:33] And that Cleopas and each of us, we would not be wrong to hope in Jesus as Redeemer. This morning, you might find yourself like Cleopas, perhaps having questions about the facts and maybe not able to put them together.

If that's the case, if that's where you're at, there's loads of really great resources. Please speak to me afterwards if you like to use the internet. Guys like Wes Halfley, Strobel, William Lane, Crager, loads of great resources on the resurrection.

But this morning, you might find yourself like Cleopas in this way, where you feel hopeless. Life is going badly.

Disappointments keep rolling in. Maybe you're troubled by your past. Maybe you see no light for your future. Maybe you resonate with this.

My life is a perfect graveyard of buried hopes. If that's where you are this morning, let me encourage you to listen in to Jesus, to look to Jesus. Because as you see from Cleopas, when hope seems lost, the resurrection of Jesus changes everything.

[15:48] So that's what we need to turn to now. Verses 25 to 34. The resurrection changes everything. We said at the beginning, Christian hope is a journey to a person and to a place. Cleopas' story is a journey.

Now, it began, and we heard it, with that sad seven-mile hike from Jerusalem to Emmaus, hope in tatters. But we read verses 33 and 34, didn't we?

Where we see the journey is reversed and where the emotions are completely different. We see a seven-mile joyful sprint. Because now he's discovered Jesus, the Son of God, is alive.

And he can't wait to tell his friends the good news. So I want us to notice three things that Jesus does for Cleopas on this journey. Three things, actually, that Jesus continues to do in people's lives today.

Three things that Jesus can do for you and for me today. So we're going to look at them briefly, think about the promise contained in them, think about the pattern there is.

[16:51] First, we need to think about what does Jesus say? Look at verses 25 to 27. What does Jesus say? Well, what we hear from Jesus, well, what Cleopas got to hear, is Jesus leading history's greatest Bible study.

How foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

So he walks them through the story of the Bible, of the Old Testament, to say to them, first of all, listen, the events of Easter that seem so shocking to you, they had to happen.

They're all part of God's salvation plan. And then he invited them into the Old Testament to see all the promises, all the prophecies made about salvation, about rescue, they come true in Jesus.

And that's something that we all need to see, that God has been writing his story of redemption on purpose, and that included the suffering and death of his son, the Lord Jesus.

[18:09] But that was not the end of the story. And so we keep reading on and we come to the resurrection of Jesus. And we've been singing, haven't we, of the victory of Jesus, of the glory of Jesus, of the demonstration of God's love in his death and resurrection.

resurrection. We've been working through the early chapters of Genesis. Remember that promise of the one who would come and crush the head of the serpent? Jesus is the great snake crusher anticipated in Genesis 3.

And he does that by tasting the sting of death, taking the wages, the punishment of sin for us, satisfying God's wrath, death.

And in his resurrection, we can have confidence that Satan has been trampled in defeat, the devil has been defanged, and we can enjoy the blessing of forgiveness.

Another hugely significant passage is Isaiah 53. And we can well imagine Jesus bringing Cleopas there in recognizing Jesus as the suffering servant, the lamb who was led to the slaughter, the one who was silent before his executioners, the one who was both substitute and sacrifice, that the Lord had laid on Jesus the sin of his people, and then, just as was promised by the prophet Isaiah, Jesus saw the light of life, and he was satisfied.

[19:50] He had finished his work, God was pleased with him, and he would bring to glory all who trusted in him. So here is the promise. Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus is the promised King. He is the great hero of God's story, and hope in him will never be disappointed. But recognize here, too, is a pattern.

Because Jesus didn't just speak back then. Jesus still speaks today through the Word of God, the Bible, by his Spirit, to reveal these same truths, that all the Bible is about Jesus, all the Bible is telling God's salvation story, where Jesus is the great Savior, and by faith, you and I can be part of that story.

If we turn from our sin, if we trust in Jesus, because he is alive, we can know new life with God. So that's what Jesus says. Let's think secondly about what does Jesus do. Look at verse 30. It's the end of the day.

[21:06] Evening is drawn in. Jesus makes the head past the village, but Cleopas and his companion invite him in for a meal. And when Jesus 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. Now, I want to ask this question. Why does this moment of breaking bread, why does that cause hope to spark in Cleopas' heart?

Because that's the moment. That's the great aha moment when he understands Jesus really is alive. Why does that happen? Maybe it's because of the time when Jesus fed the great crowd of 5,000 plus people.

And when Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. I am the one who satisfies your deep hunger. I've been sent by God to do that. I am God's provision for hungry hearts and souls.

Perhaps it was as Cleopas was thinking about what happened at the last supper as Jesus celebrated the Passover, and he took bread, and he said, this is my body, broken for you.

[22:29] Cleopas understood that in the body of Jesus being broken, and the blood spilled at the cross, sin was forgiven, relationship was restored, and the promise that feeds hope is that Jesus is now alive.

Jesus is now sharing fellowship with his people. He's with us always to the end of the age. Jesus still is providing the goodness and mercy to sustain his followers in their lives of faith, bringing hope where everything seems hopeless, and recognize that Jesus comes near and does good not to perfect followers, not to perfect people.

Jesus is so patient and kind as to share fellowship with doubting, troubled, sinful followers who look to him in faith.

That's his promise. And the pattern that backs up that promise, the pattern he sets, well, it's the Lord's Supper. It's that visible sermon that Jesus dies so that trusting in him, we, we can live.

And Jesus lives to be our source of strength to make sure that we make it to journey's end, that we will be home with our Lord and our King forever.

[24:11] I wonder for those of us who are Christians, are you here today and you feel weak? Do you feel your hope and your faith is weak?

Do you feel like you're hanging on by your fingernails? Recognize and rest in this. Your hope and mine is not, I think I'll make it.

Our hope is in the risen Christ's commitment to make sure you and I will. He will save us and he will keep us. Consider these words of the pastor Thomas Goodwin.

We owe our standing every moment to his, that's Jesus, to his sitting in heaven and interceding every moment.

He sacrificed for you, he prays for you, those prayers will not fail. Jesus must quit heaven and give up living there if he does not bring us to be with him.

[25:19] Do we understand how committed Jesus is to our eternal salvation? He will not fail. The death and resurrection stands as proof. Those hands that were held out on the cross to save sinners, those hands that broke bread to feed weary, troubled souls, those are the hands that hold us.

He is our hope. The third thing to notice is this, what effect does Jesus bring? And that takes us to verse 32, and those burning hearts, what a wonderful phrase.

Here's Cleopas and his friend, they ask each other, were not our hearts burning within us? Well he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us. again, if hope is the fuel that drives the engine, I wonder this morning what level our tank is at.

Maybe for some of us we're beginning to see, even as we've come here, maybe my hope is actually placed in the wrong thing. Maybe I'm placing my hope in myself, or in my job, or in my wealth, or in my health, and there's that recognition that this is coming up empty.

Maybe we're following Jesus, but our hope is growing dim. It's like those dark clouds are covering the sun, so we don't feel it's warm.

[26:56] Well listen to Cleopas. Having met the risen Jesus, Jesus explained the Bible is true, the events of Easter have purpose, his death has given way to resurrection victory, and recognize that it's hope in the risen Jesus that can set your heart ablaze today.

I think some of us we know this feeling. It's one of those things that's easier felt than tell, as we say as Scots, but you'll know it.

Maybe it's the hushed moment in a sermon as if you could hear a pin drop. It's as if God himself has spoken to us.

But maybe the burning heart comes when you're speaking to an older godly Christian and you get that glimpse into a life of faith that seems so real and so beautiful and it causes your heart heart to be inflamed by joy.

Maybe it comes sitting at home with your Bible. It's like you've done many, many times and all of a sudden those words jump off the page and they come alive and the gospel cuts right to your heart and meets you at your point of need.

[28:28] Maybe it's the moment when you prayed and asked Jesus to forgive and to save you. Jesus is in the business of working on our hearts and Jesus is so good and kind as to give us these moments to send his spirit to confirm to us that these things are true.

And the promise is that Jesus still works in hearts and still works in lives today. That when we meet the risen Jesus we receive the Holy Spirit and remember that when the Spirit was sent first how did it appear as a flame of fire?

That fire burns as we realize Jesus is alive and he loves me and he is with me and he is for me. And we can have that certainty if we turn to him in faith.

And then don't you love what happens next? I think it's the pattern that God sets for all believers. He discovers these things are true. Hope is burning in his heart.

And so he doesn't keep it to himself. Rather he runs joyfully to spread the word to the disciples. And Cleopas is part of that first generation that will begin to turn the world upside down with the good news that it is true the Lord has risen.

[29:55] sin. And that's the basis for our hope. It is true that Jesus is alive. And so this Easter I can invite each one of us into Christian hope.

Because Christ has been raised. Forgiveness of sin has been secured. The promise of eternal life with God can be proclaimed. the power and the presence of the risen Lord Jesus can be our experience in the journey of life.

In that journey of life and faith that ultimately will lead us to Jesus. One day to be made like him and to be with him forever.

A journey that will lead us who have faith to the glory of heaven and ultimately to new creation. to a world free of sickness and pain and sin and suffering and death.

A joyful world where all hope comes true forever. Some of us, we're suffering.

[31:12] We know trouble. We know grief. If our path is marked by disappointment and despair, we know that we are here today and you're searching someone to hold on to, someone to give you hope in life and in death.

Let me invite each one of us to turn to the risen Lord Jesus. Ask him to walk with you on the journey of life and to lead you to your eternal home.

Let's pray together. Lord our God, we thank you that these things are true, that Jesus is alive and because Jesus is alive, we have living hope.

Let's pray.