

The Risen Christ: Our Only 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: 27 March 2016

[0:00] Amen. The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing.! Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

! They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sign shall flee away. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. So just in the past week, a terrorist plot in Brussels, Belgium, left at least 28 victims dead.

Explosions ripped through the airport and through a metro station, leaving many dead, many more wounded. This awful tragedy happened shortly after an even deadlier attack in Turkey earlier in the month.

And that attack was shortly preceded by a terrorist attack in Ivory Coast, but left 22 dead. Violence and instability continue in the Middle East, where many of our Christian brothers and sisters are being persecuted, kidnapped, and killed for their faith at the hands of groups like ISIS.

Our Christian brothers and sisters in Africa are being targeted by a similar group called Boko Haram. Recently saw a report that named 2015 as the worst year in modern history for the persecution of Christians.

[1:44] Yet this morning we say, Alleluia! Christ is risen! In times like these, we need more than ever to hear that beautiful truth, that beautiful reality that Christ really is risen!

Now you might be wondering, why in the world your rector started with bad news on Easter Sunday? I assure you, I didn't do it to bum you out.

In fact, quite the opposite. It's to clearly declare that no matter how dark things look in the world, in our community, in our lives, that darkness will not have the last word.

Amen. That's what the empty tomb, coming only three days after Christ's agonizing death on the cross. That's what the empty tomb tells us.

Christ is risen from the dead. And that changes everything. The crucified and risen Christ is our only hope, and he is also our certain hope.

[2:59] He is the victor, he is the conqueror, he has defeated sin, death, and the devil, triumphed over every evil, and if we are in him through faith, his victory is our victory too.

Jesus is our only hope. So I was preparing the sermon, and I came across this quote from Ravi Zacharias, who said, Outside of the cross of Jesus Christ, there is no hope in this world.

That cross and resurrection at the core of the gospel is the only hope for humanity. I repeat again, that cross and resurrection at the core of the gospel is the only hope for humanity.

I started my sermon in the way that I did, in order to more clearly highlight the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, and to underscore that we have no other hope.

But in Christ, we have every hope we could ever need. And we see that hope declared in our reading from Acts for this morning, which we didn't read.

[4:23] I think there was some confusion because some pesky priest has been messing around with the lectern Bible during Holy Week, confession time.

But that's okay, because we're going to be going through it verse by verse anyway. So let's look at it in Acts 10, what we see the Apostle Peter proclaiming there.

He starts in verse 1. Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Now it's important here that Peter starts out telling the story of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection, in the way that he does. Because Peter, who was a Jew by birth, is speaking to Gentiles, speaking to the rest of us.

He's pointing out that what Jesus has done isn't just good news for only one nation, not just for one people, not just for a select few.

[5:33] It is good news for the whole world. It's good news that the whole world needs. Peter goes on, as for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ.

He is Lord of all. You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism that John proclaimed. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

Now here, Peter is describing Jesus' ministry. How Jesus went through all of Judea preaching the good news. What is that good news that he preached? The good news that he preached was himself in the kingdom of God.

The good news that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the chosen one. He is the one that God sent to save his people from their sins and from death.

Jesus, as the Son of God, sent by his Father to save his people. Born as a man, proclaimed by his Father as his beloved Son, who taught that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

[6 : 54] Peter continues, He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.

Jesus set out to heal those who were wounded, those held in captivity by the devil, the evil one, and he was successful at setting them free.

Why? How? Because though he is a man, the Lord Jesus is more than that.

He is also God. All power and all authority belong to him. He could heal those oppressed by the devil because he is stronger than the devil, stronger than sin and evil, and stronger than death.

Amen. As we see in our passage though, some people didn't take kindly to all the good that he did. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear.

[8 : 13] Not to all the people, but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. What happened there?

Well, here's what happened. And the devil, the evil powers of this world, and the sinfulness of mankind conspired to crucify Jesus, the Son of God, to put him to death.

Here's something those forces that conspired to put Jesus to death weren't counting on. Jesus went to his death willingly, and death was not strong enough to hold him.

Jesus died for us, was crucified for us, voluntarily. All of us are sinners, yet he was willing to die for us, willing to die for sinners, for the unrighteous.

As Paul writes in Romans 5, for while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die.

[9 : 29] But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

We are saved by Jesus, saved from the wrath of God, saved through his blood. Jesus died the death that we deserve in our place, that if we have faith in him, faith in his blood, our sins are forgiven.

Praise God. And that is why the Lord Jesus went to his death willingly. But that isn't all.

Death could not contain him. He rose from the dead in three days. How? Why? Well, Jesus is God. Jesus is life itself. Jesus is more powerful than death. More powerful than the devil. He entered into death and conquered it, crushed it, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

[11 : 00] because of our sin, we are subject to death, subject to the devil, subject to the slavery that is the fear of death.

But we don't have to be afraid anymore. why? Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, rose again, destroying death, crushing the devil's skull, so that we who believe in him have the gift of eternal life.

Death, the resurrection of Jesus, means that all who believe in him have forgiveness of sins in his name, also means that we don't have to be afraid of death if we are in Christ.

Because his rising to life again guarantees that we will rise too. Now, I have to admit, this probably won't come to as a surprise to all of you.

Maybe some of you, I don't know. I'm a little bit of a nerd when it comes to, like, in fantasy novels. As I was preparing for this sermon, a bit from the Lord of the Rings trilogy came to mind.

[12:28] It's a classic. In the story, one character says to another, is everything sad going to come untrue? What do you think, brothers and sisters?

Is everything sad going to come untrue? What is there that can take away the joy, the hope that we have in Christ?

Not our guilt, for there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Not the sufferings of this life, because the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Not death, because like the thief on the cross who repented, we will be with Jesus in paradise when we depart this life, and we will be raised from the dead when he comes again.

Certainly not the devil, because his destruction is certain. The resurrection of Christ guarantees it. Will everything that is sad come untrue?

[13:38] And we look at the world around us, the terrorist attacks I was talking about earlier, the persecution of our brothers and sisters in Christ, the terrible stuff that we see in the world around us, the violence, the suffering, the cruelty, the pain, the evil, the injustice.

What about that? Everything that is sad come untrue. Well, the resurrection of Jesus guarantees that Jesus really will return, just as he promised to confirm forever his victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Our catechism puts it this way. Jesus promised that he would return. His coming in victory with great glory and power will be seen by all people and bring this age to an end.

The present world order will pass away and God will usher in a fully renewed creation to stand forever. All the saints will be together with God at that time.

When Jesus comes again, God will usher in a fully renewed creation to stand forever because of what the cross and resurrection of Christ have accomplished.

[15:10] He will establish new heavens and a new earth. We will be raised from the dead and believers will be given new bodies that will never die and never break.

we will dwell with God forever in perfect joy, in perfect peace, in a place where death shall be no more.

Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore. Why? Because the former things have passed away.

we have this assurance only because of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that is why, as I quoted earlier, the cross and resurrection of Christ is the only hope for mankind.

It is the only hope we have that evil won't defeat good, that wrong won't defeat right, that death won't defeat life and that pain won't defeat joy.

[16:21] But it is a certain hope. Good will defeat evil, right will defeat wrong, life will defeat death, and joy will defeat pain.

All because Christ is risen. I just want to take a moment to say that if there's anyone here this morning hearing this and you're not a Christian believer, I want you to know that by faith you can find forgiveness of your sins through the blood of Jesus and the promise of eternal life through his resurrection.

The text that I preached from this morning says of Jesus, everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

and my Christian brothers and sisters, I encourage you to join me this morning in celebrating the victory that is ours in Jesus.

Through his blood, our sins have been forgiven. Through his resurrection, we have eternal life. That is a reason to celebrate.

[17:37] even when things get tough, maybe things are tough for you right now. Even then, the world cannot take our hope in Christ from us.

It's a hope worth living for. And as some of our brothers and sisters throughout the world and throughout the ages have found, it's even a hope worth dying for.

So, let's really live for it. Let's draw nearer to the Lord in prayer, grow in our relationship with him.

Let's spend more time in God's word.

Let's prioritize our fellowship with other believers. And let's reach out to our community with the love of Jesus Christ. And let's be joyful.

Our sins are forgiven. Christ is risen. Death is defeated. And as our reading from Isaiah, appointed for this morning, reminds us, everlasting joy shall be upon our heads.

[18 : 52] We shall obtain gladness and joy. And sorrow and sighing shall flee away. hallelujah, Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen to thee. Hallelujah. Amen. Amen.