

Luke 24:1-12 "Easter Hope for Everyone"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

So great to get to worship together with you all. What a joy today in particular. If you'd turn with me to Luke chapter 24.

Luke 24 is on page 884 of the Bible in the pew in front of you. In our study of Luke's gospel, we have finally made it to the last chapter.

And it's such a great chapter. I wish we could cover it all this morning. We can't do that. We've got Easter celebrations to go on. But we will finish it up in the next few weeks. There's so much great stuff in Luke 24.

If you haven't been here with us for the last 18 years, I mean, a little while. Now, Luke is writing this story in these previous 23 chapters.

[1 : 04] He's writing it about 30 years after the events take place. Telling us about the life of Jesus. Who He is. What He's done. He writes this orderly, researched, eyewitness-based account so that we'll know who Jesus really is.

He tells us awesome stuff like He's been healing sick people. He's been teaching about a new society where outsiders are insiders. He's telling people about eternal hope that's beyond this life. But all the time, through 23 chapters, Jesus has been telling us that the most important thing is yet to come. That He's going and He's going to suffer and die and rise again.

And that's the most important part. But that was confusing to nearly everyone. Sure enough, in just the last chapter of this story, Jesus has died Friday afternoon on a cross.

Been buried in a tomb while many look on, including women preparing spices to embalm His body. And then He's left dead in a guarded tomb through the Sabbath on Saturday.

[2 : 19] And as we turn to chapter 24, it's early Sunday morning now. As I read, I'd encourage you to see yourself in one of the characters in this story.

First, you'll see the women who are headed to the tomb for a funeral. They're followers of Jesus, but they're discouraged at life and the circumstances when they look around.

Maybe you feel like that. Then there's apostles, disciples who are skeptical when they hear about a resurrection. What? And then at the end, there's the one who's probably the most shameful person in the room.

The biggest failure, Peter. And he gets involved in the story at the end. I've seen myself in all three of these characters. So listen as I read, and then we'll talk about the impact of the resurrection on people like them, like us.

Luke chapter 24, verse 1. This is God's Word. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.

[3 : 29] And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.

And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise?

And they remembered his words. And returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.

But these words seemed to them an idle tale. They did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb, stooping and looking in. He saw the linen cloths by themselves.

And he went home marveling at what had happened. This is God's word. Let's pray together.

Father, we've read this glorious story a few times now.

[4 : 46] Many of us have heard it hundreds of times. And Father, I confess in my own heart, sometimes I'm numb to it. To the glory of it all.

Father, for many of us, it's a story that changes our clothes on a particular Sunday each year, but doesn't really change our lives. Oh, Father, help us.

Help me this morning. We didn't come to hear me speak. We came to hear from you. Jesus, would you, if you're alive and we believe you are, speak.

Speak through your word this morning and help all of us to see our risen Savior. Would you do that?

We ask in your name. Amen.

Kids, maybe you're a little bit like my three daughters. They're very hopeful kids. They say things like this. I hope we go to Disney World this summer.

[5 : 53] Keep hoping. I hope I get a unicorn for my birthday. Very unlikely. I hope we will have a baby sister.

There are three of you already. Often for us, hope is detached from reality, isn't it?

It's wishes and dreams and unicorns. That's not the hope the Bible talks about. The hope the Bible talks about as Easter is meant to be very different from that.

Rather, it's a confidence based in the reality of a gracious, almighty God and a risen, living Savior.

When the Bible talks about hope, it describes it as an anchor. A firm foundation that you can stand on. As a living hope that breaks into the realities and struggles of this life.

[6 : 57] As an eternal hope that will never disappoint you and never let you down. In fact, a hope that is described as a person.

More than once, hope is Jesus Christ himself. Our hope. Hope as a person. We all need that, don't we? This hope, this Easter hope is impossible for us fully to grasp.

Artists struggle because the resurrection is such a grand event. How do you capture the grandeur of that? Preachers will struggle for about 25 more minutes to paint the picture for you of the glory of the resurrection.

Might even have some help from the microphone. There's a chance. We all struggle to grasp the impact of the resurrection.

But it's actually simple. Your kids can tell you. They just heard. Jesus is alive. And so there's hope. It's not more complicated than that.

[8 : 06] We all need hope. And every character in this Easter story that we just read needs hope to fearful people, skeptics, failures.

All of us need the hope of Jesus, the living Savior. Well, let's start with the women at the tomb.

Now imagine this morning that you're Joanna. One of the women we're told is there. You've

followed Jesus for the last couple of years all the way from Galilee. You've heard him teach.

You've seen how he lives. How he treats you with respect and includes you in a way that no one else ever has. You've hoped that he was the Messiah.

The deliverer for God's people. And then just 36 hours ago, you watched his pierced, crushed body laid in a tomb.

[9 : 05] And your hopes are crushed too. He was such a good guy, but now he's dead. I mean, you've come back this Sunday morning out of respect.

And now the stone is gone. His body's gone. That's what you came for, to get it ready for burial.

And you're confused, perplexed, verse 4 says.

We think of joy on Easter morning. They're just perplexed. What's going on? And all of a sudden, two shining angels show up. Now you're frightened.

You're just scared. What's happening? And they ask this piercing question. Why do you seek the living among the dead?

You're looking around at your life. You're discouraged, disheartened, unsure of what's next. Things aren't going as planned. You're going to be the first of many followers of Jesus to feel this way.

[10 : 08] This world is glorious, but it's painful and hard, isn't it? I've talked to just some of our members this week.

Some of whom who are going through a really painful loss of loved ones. It hurts. Some of whom have received really discouraging cancer diagnoses this week. And it hurts. Others are wrestling with the reality of loneliness. The unexpected loss of a hoped-for future in a marriage or family.

And I know there are a lot of griefs like that in this room. More than I'm aware of. Those pains are real. I've felt many of them myself.

That's the world in which we live. And the question comes to us, I think especially in those moments, do we have a dead Savior or a living one?

[11 : 09] That's going to make all the difference, isn't it? Because, see, if He's a dead leader, then He's left behind maybe a few helpful bits of advice to get through the hard times.

Maybe He said some nice things. But mostly, you just need to respect His body, His memory, carry on with life. He's got nothing else for you.

If He's dead, y'all, shape your life around money, your kids, your image, something. Sprinkle in some religion when it makes you feel good.

There's no real news to tell anyone. Does anyone sound as much like your life many days as it does mine?

Is it possible that we live looking for a dead Savior? Well, there's good news. There's good news for those who may be looking for a living Savior among the dead.

[12 : 11] Verse 6, He is not here, but has risen. Remember how He told you while He was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day, rise?

And the women hear these words and they remembered Jesus' words. It doesn't just mean they thought of Him for the first time. It means they remembered and it drove them to hopeful action. Returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. The angels point the women back where? To the words of Jesus. He's alive and do you remember He told you this was going to happen?

They'd heard. We've read them more than once in Luke. But they've never understood. For the first time, they understand what Jesus was saying. And they hear the words with hope.

It begins to sink in. Joanna, this changes everything. It starts to hit them as they're standing there.

[13 : 19] Now we have a purpose in life again. Now there's a mission to accomplish. There's good news to tell everyone we better get going. See, a living Savior means hope.

Right? Do you see through the eyes of these women how it's not possible for Jesus to be alive but irrelevant? That can't be true.

A living Savior cannot be a footnote or a sidebar to your life. You can't pick a few Sundays to say He's risen indeed and dress up and act happy about it and then live the rest of your days as though He's actually dead like everyone else who's ever lived.

Listen, Joanna, Southwood, Huntsville, if your Savior is alive, you're not alone in anything.

If your Savior is alive, your best days are still ahead of you regardless of your age, regardless of your health. If He's alive, then every word that He's said can be trusted.

[14 : 29] Everyone. Everyone. And every one of them is worth shaping your life around. You must shape your life around every one of His words. If our Savior walked out of the grave, that transforms our lives.

In fact, it makes us willing to die for Him as His followers will do. Beginning with these women who will encounter the risen Jesus shortly.

Person after person through the centuries around the world has experienced that reality that changes life and gives hope in death. If you're a Christian in Sri Lanka this morning, hundreds of them are meeting the risen Jesus series of bombings in churches in that country this morning that have killed and injured hundreds.

And the dead Savior doesn't help. He has to be alive. There's a living hope both for those who died and for those who grieved their loss.

And if that happened in Huntsville, God forbid, the only hope would be a living Savior who can actually do something still today about that.

[15 : 42] It's our only hope. Listen, if you're a discouraged Christian as you look around you at your life. If you're a distracted Christian that's been claiming to follow Jesus but not living like He's really alive.

Then remember the hope. Why do you look for the living among the dead? He's not here. He has risen. Remember His words to you.

Anchor your life in His promises because you can count on all of them. Shape who you are around everything He said. Ask Him to meet you in your confusion.

Pray for His Spirit to breathe life into your dry spirit that feels distant. There's hope in your darkest place because He has conquered sin and death and the grave.

And He promises to bring all who trust Him into His victory parade. Amen. That's hope. It's hope for confused, discouraged, fearful, perplexed followers.

[16:54] It's actually hope for skeptics too. They're in this story. The women come and tell the apostles the good news. They must be so excited, right? Verse 11. But these words seemed to them an idle tale.

And they did not believe them. Is that how you feel about the Easter story? I just don't believe it. Guess who else didn't? Jesus' disciples, the first time they heard it, thought, that's crazy.

You don't know what you're talking about. Now, if that's you today and you came because you just preferred to come than to start a family argument. You came because a friend you really like asked you and you didn't have the heart to say no.

You came because you really like jelly beans like me and Miss Angela. And you hope maybe after the service the adults get some like the kids got earlier. I get that. Whatever reason you're here this morning, you may be thinking, well, I don't need that hope.

Then ask for hope. I'm just fine. I hear that. But I want to tell you I need it. And I think you need it too.

[18:12] See, best I can tell, we all feel personally significant. And we all long to be loved. Both of those things, my experience tells me that's all of us.

Those are great things about being human, being valuable, feeling loved. And what Jesus offers starting today and lasting forever is permanent value and love.

That's the offer, the hope of Jesus. See, if this is all there is, this life, you may be valuable and feel loved for a little while. But it will end soon, right?

Because we all die. If the hope after death is reincarnation or disembodied existence, then there may be value and love, but it won't actually be you there to experience the value and love that you really have.

You won't actually be significant and loved there. But listen, if Jesus walked out of that tomb, then there's an eternal, personal, meaningful hope.

[19:24] A God you can know and have relationship with and partner with in renewing and restoring this whole world. With endless opportunity for significance and love forever.

I want you to know that kind of hope. It's so much fuller, so much deeper. If that possibility exists that there's hope like that, isn't it worth investigating at least?

Like the apostles who ran to look into silly reports that they'd heard. Certainly aren't true. Who with their own eyes and ears in the coming days would meet Jesus and then stake their lives on that truth.

Maybe you say, well, that does sound great. Well, it's just not true. That's kind of the crux of it, isn't it? I can't walk through every angle right now, but just look in this passage at a few things.

If they were making it up, what happens with Jesus walking out of the tomb? Why have women be the first witnesses? Their testimony wasn't legally valid in Roman or Jewish courts.

[20:37] Now listen, that's wrong and that's sad. And we need to say that. But it's the culture in which they were living. Why them as witnesses then?

Unless it's true. Why list their names as Luke has done throughout his eyewitness-laden report? Jesus doesn't appear in this passage himself, but he does appear after his death and resurrection to over 500 people.

When people read these names, when Luke is written, they still know the people whose names are in this book. They know their kids. It's like small-town Alabama today.

I know her. I know Joanna's daughter. I know what happened. I talked to her. If these were farcical tales, they would have been debunked quickly in first-century Palestine, where not only would the Jews have been happy to, but the Romans who were in power would have quashed them and been happy to help.

Why list their names unless they were actually the ones there? Why have the embarrassing, shameful, exposing of the disciples as unbelieving unless it's true?

[21 : 55] They're the leaders in the church. Maybe they should save face, you know, edit the text a little bit. But, no. Y'all, if you think that resurrection doesn't make sense to naturalistic, this earth is all there is, 21st century Americans, it's really inconvenient for ancient Near Eastern Jews who believe there's only one God, who don't know anything about a resurrection until the end of time.

They don't have a category for this, and trying to spread this fact is going to be really, really hard. A leader cursed on a cross? Doesn't matter what happens after that.

Coming back to life? That's not the way to win popularity as a potential Messiah, a promised deliverer. They would never have made it up that way. Unless they didn't make it up.

Unless it was true. Some of my skeptical friends say they don't like the Bible's teaching on money or sexuality or something like that.

So they write off even looking into the resurrection. Listen, y'all. Start with the resurrection. Start here with Jesus himself. And don't let the other things distract you from that.

[23 : 14] Is he alive or is he dead? Because if you look into that, and if while you are he meets you there and you realize he's alive, then I think he'll walk with you through the moral or ethical struggles.

He'll help you with that. Others of my friends actually kind of say the opposite. Will, I'm really cool with the ethical teaching of scriptures.

Love the golden rule. Give me some Ten Commandments. I love being called a Christian. I'll go to church. Church, just don't ask me to buy any of the supernatural stuff.

I mean, the idea of fresh starts, new life is great. I like that. Just don't ask me to pretend that Jesus actually rose from the dead.

Leave that in the children's moment. Come on now, Will. Listen, y'all, a theoretical resurrection doesn't offer eternal hope or meaningful relationship.

[24 : 16] The things that we need and long for, that's a dead Savior. You can have theoretical positive thinking and change your outlook and your Savior be dead.

But you have to be alive if you answer my simple prayer requests. If you work in my life like Jesus does, you have to be alive now to do that. Jesus taught a lot.

A lot of things. But one thing he taught was that he wasn't primarily here to be a teacher. He said the most important thing he came to be about was to die and rise from the dead.

So if you think he's a good teacher, if you follow some of his words, follow all of them. And start where he says is most important. Ask him this morning to show himself to you.

To open your heart to see and know him. Because wouldn't it be great if it were true? Wouldn't it be worth finding out? There's one guy it would be especially great for in this story.

[25 : 17] One of all the skeptical apostles gets singled out. Verse 12. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb.

Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves and he went home marveling at what had happened. In Luke's story about Jesus, Peter has a really prominent role, especially in the last 72 hours.

He has promised his allegiance to Jesus and then at the moment of Jesus' greatest need, he's denied him three times. He's let his Savior down and he has gone out and wept bitterly about it. It's as though the team has lost the game and he's the one who blew it. It's like the kicker who's just missed the short field goal at the end of the game.

And you know what they start doing? They start following him along the sidelines. It's terrible. It's morbid kind of. I wish they didn't do this. But they start following him with the camera as you're watching the game. He's sitting there with his head in his hands.

[26 : 26] He's all alone, right? On the end of the bench. And then as the clock is getting ready to expire, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, they flash back to the field and somebody has blocked a punt and returned it for a touchdown as time expires to win the game.

And who runs out onto the field the fastest? The guy who was the goat just a second ago. And all of a sudden, he's off the hook.

He failed. But there's a hero who stepped in for him and won the game and he's so thankful. That's how I picture Peter here.

He hears this seeming unbelievable story and he races to see, could it possibly be true? But Peter rose and ran to the tomb.

You better believe he ran. And it's like the way I run to Jesus after a week where I haven't loved my wife well. Or I've spoken harshly to my girls. It's like the way you ran to church at the end of a rough weekend in college.

[27 : 33] It's like the way we run to God after a tough season of life where we run as far away from God as we possibly can and then get desperate and say, I've got to run back. And we hear the hope of Jesus, a living Savior, and realize, could it possibly be true?

We're off the hook now? The ones who've really blown it? Y'all, there's hope for the biggest failures. For Peter. For you. For me. If Jesus is alive, it means he paid the price for our sin. Death. And he came back to offer us life instead. Peter's still not sure what to think when he starts to see it.

He just marvels. I think at the possibility. What could it mean? I may not have to live the rest of my life ashamed.

I won't have to carry the weight of my guilt every day. I'll have renewed purpose and hope. Maybe. Maybe that could be real. And see, Easter, a living Savior, is proof that Jesus paid for our sins.

[28 : 44] That his payment is accepted and he is vindicated. That's what Easter is. My daughters and I went shopping at Costco a few Saturdays ago.

And we love to do that together. We got some things in our cart. We checked out. And then we went to the deli for lunch, as usual. And so we finished up eating.

Got in the cart. Walked towards the door. And it was then that I realized what I'd done. I threw away the receipt with the pizza plates. It's a terrible mistake at Costco.

If you've never been to Costco, it's one of those stores where to get out the door, you have to have a receipt that shows that the items in your cart have been paid for. And I had nothing.

I wasn't about to dig through the trash for it. I was stuck until I was able to get a copy of that receipt. Y'all, Jesus' resurrection is your receipt.

[29 : 44] It is proof that your sin has been paid for. Jesus on the cross says he's paid it all. He pleads his blood as forgiveness for your sins. And then his resurrection is proof that his death in your place covers all your sins.

That there's life instead of death for you. That's the hope of a living Savior for failures. He's not just one more in a line of failed leaders with big promises offering to help.

No, he's the one true Messiah, King, vindicated by the resurrection, alive forevermore, adopting failures into his family.

There's hope for you. Doom, Spiro, Sparrow. A neat Latin motto dating back to Cicero.

It means, while I breathe, I hope. It's a nice sentiment, right? It encourages you not to give up while there's still a chance remaining, even in the fourth quarter.

[30 : 59] But friends, Easter, a living Savior, gives much greater hope than that. Because sometimes people breathe no more.

It's a reality, isn't it? That happens to each of us. But Jesus is alive and will never die.

Ever. And so while he breathes, I hope. I connect myself to him and to his life so much that I never have to stop hoping while he lives.

And he lives how long? Forever. Never to die. So whether I still breathe or not. Whether I get my life together or not.

Whether the darkness is closing in on me or not. I hope. I hope. I have confidence. Jesus says, fear not.

[32 : 03] I am the first and the last and the living one. And behold, I died and am alive forevermore.

And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Y'all, a living Savior in charge of everyone and everything that's against you.

There's hope. A living hope for confused or skeptical or ashamed people. For every one of us. He always lives and that changes everything.

And gives you hope today. And forever. A living hope. An unfading eternity. Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Why do you seek the living among the dead?

He is not here. He has risen. Let's pray. Jesus, you are our hope.

[33 : 04] We bring nothing that we could offer. We can't live well enough.

We cannot die well enough. To pay for our sins. To find our way back to a God who created us and loves us and rejoices in us.

And so, Jesus, would you show yourself to us this morning? Would we see a risen, living King who loves His people?

Who welcomes all of us back home to His Father? Give us hope. Not in us, but in Him. We ask in His name.

Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.