

Hope for the Future

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[0 : 0 0] Hello everyone. Nice to see you. My name is James. Good to be with you today. I'm genuinely an optimistic person. I find it easier to see the good in situations and to see the good in people. But as you can imagine, this has been sorely tested over the last year. The pandemic has been just one of many different crises that have been occurring. Technology and social media advances have been outstripping our ability to understand their impact on how people work, let alone their influence more broadly. There are economic uncertainties where low interest rates are good for those who own a house, but those who are trying to save money or trying to live off interest, it's very difficult. There's been political polarization, which is pushing people further apart, and common ground is more and more difficult to find. There is very little agreement on what it means to move forward. There's very little agreement on the place we want to move forward to as a society. And we have a hope that tomorrow will be better. But then we can often get let down when we get there and it's not better.

When we build our hope on external, undependable things, I'm not sure if that's a word, undependable. I'm going to use it like a word. When we build our hope on external things that we can't depend on, like a vaccine coming. We build our hope, the vaccine's going to come, it's going to be great, the rollout starts. Oh, actually don't use this vaccine anymore. Our hopes can be dashed. We can end up on an emotional roller coaster of our hopes being lifted and dashed and lifted and dashed.

And so how do we get a hope for tomorrow that will actually last? Not just for us as individuals, but for us as a society. How do we survive when it seems that there isn't much hope for tomorrow?

Today is the last day in our short series looking at the impact of Easter on us, the impact of Jesus' resurrection on our lives. Last week we saw the impact of the resurrection on our relationships, and now we see the impact of the resurrection on our hope for the future. And our challenge today will be for us to see our hope in the future and to put our trust in the God who is in control of our future.

So as we do this, as we have a look at that passage that was read for us as well, let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for who you are, that you are a kind, a good, a generous and loving God.

[2 : 5 6] God, as we sit in a place of a measure of uncertainty and fear, even though much of Australia is open again, Father, help us to understand the hope that we have in you and not depend upon things that are outside our control, Lord. Amen.

So as we seek to understand what hope is and build our hope, first of all, it would be good to have another definition of hope.

I find hope is one of these words that can just become a bit wishy-washy over time, but I think a good definition of hope is that it is confident expectation.

So it's not vain guessing, it's not a hope tomorrow, the weather is nice. No, no, no, it's I've had a look at the weather forecast, I've spoken to the meteorologist from church, and do you know what, I have confident expectation that tomorrow will be, I'm not sure, I don't even know what the weather is like tomorrow.

So hope is confident expectation. And it's important as we consider the basis of our hope, our first point this morning, the basis of our hope, it's important to consider what the basis of our hope is for the culture around us.

[4 : 12] What does hope mean for the people around us? What is hope in the Western worldview? How do we get to where we are right now? For a long time, people, as people have believed, that each generation will have a better life than the generation before.

So economically, we'll be better, we'll have more money, socially, we'll be better, we'll be kinder people, we'll have better technology, personally. And eventually, if you look at two television shows that I used to watch growing up, we go from being like the Flintstones to, does anybody remember the other version?

The Jetsons. So we go from the Stone Age to futuristic technology. And we might see Flintstones, we've definitely moved away from that. Jetsons, we're getting to that.

We still don't have flying cars. Well, there are some flying cars. We don't all have flying cars yet. We'll get there. And so for a long time, we as society have believed in progress. There is hope for tomorrow.

Things will always get better. But most other cultures throughout history have seen culture and time as cyclical. Things go through patterns.

[5 : 23] There is no constant progression. Steve touched on this a couple of weeks ago. This view of history and the future saw things as rhythmic, with an explosive end and then starting again, with rebirth and then evolution and then death and rebirth.

So in Norse mythology, it was called Ragnarok. In Greek, it was described as paleriginesia for this cycle of rebirth.

Confucianism saw the world as constantly recreating itself through the balances of yin and yang. And so before Christianity, the idea that history was a linear line that was continually progressing just did not exist.

For most other cultures, everything was rhythmic and cyclical. But Christians don't believe in the future as a cycle.

The Bible describes one future destination, which I can't remember his name. The person who wasn't Dan helpfully showed us. A wonderful end point where all pain would end and everything would be put right, something that will last forever.

[6 : 34] Heaven. Christians can have hope in the future, not because it will go through a cycle of change, but because there is a God who is in control who will take us to that end point.

And so instead of having little hope, instead of having no hope because the future is just a cycle, nothing really changes, Christians have hope because we know the end point.

The end point where we will be with the returned King Jesus. And so as Christianity grew, it impacted culture around it.

It impacted the scientists. And so scientists continually advanced in their understanding. It impacts medicine and technology. And so that as Christianity grew, this idea of progress grew.

This idea that we were going from where we are now to a glorious future grew into the culture around us. Eventually, in the 1700s, this idea of progression disconnected from Christianity in the European Enlightenment.

[7 : 38] But a lot of these thinkers still kept the idea of progression. So you take someone like Karl Marx, the communist thinker, and he saw history moving to more and more justice for more people.

Taking that idea out of Christianity, things are going to get better for more people. Charles Darwin, again, saw nature around us continually progressing. Things are evolving.

And so as we get to the 1900s, there is this view that society is evolving. Things are going to keep getting better. And there was wonderful hope. The next generation is going to be more evolved.

They're going to be more advanced. It is good for them. But then as we came into the 1900s, this view took a hit. There was this thought that as we continually got more and more knowledge, we'd be able to help more people.

Technology's going to be good. There's going to be more food. We'll be able to solve poverty. There is much hope because there is advances in modern medicine and science. But unfortunately, the Germans, who were considered to be both culturally and scientifically advanced, they used their knowledge to destroy lives and to dehumanize people.

[8 : 56] We see that in World War II. And so this secular idea of continual progress starts to fall apart. We lose this hope that we have that society is just going to keep getting better.

And so now we're in an interesting spot in society, in history, where maybe for once the future doesn't seem more bright than it did.

Maybe tomorrow actually doesn't look as attractive. Maybe the best is behind us. We sit in a place of cultural depression.

I see advances in technology that actually aren't advances for us as people. They seem to actually be taking us backwards as people. I see the impact on kids and teenagers and the impact on brains and society.

And it seems that the brave new world that we're heading towards isn't actually better. If hope is confident expectation, do I have confident expectation that the tomorrow that we are heading towards is better than what we have today?

[10 : 10] So why do I tell you all this? Why do I just leave you feeling a little depressed about where we're going as a society? Ultimately, it's because we can't trust humans to be good.

We can't just assume that the more knowledge we gain, the better we'll be as a society and everything will be fine. We can't trust humans to do that. We can't trust humans to choose to do the right thing by other people because we could have solved poverty by now.

We could have solved racism by now. But we as people haven't. If our hope, our confident expectation can't reliably be found within us or with our society moving forward, if it's not going to actually get better with the life expectancy and compassion for other people and love, well, if there's no hope, then let's turn to the Bible.

Let's have a look at that passage that Emma read for us and see the hope that God offers us. From 1 Peter 1, verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Peter outlines a very different kind of hope for us, a 2,000-year-old hope, but one that is better.

[11 : 34] And so the basis for our hope is not that we would get better. Our basis for hope is not that society would solve our problems. Our basis for hope is three things. God's great mercy, the resurrection, and our new birth.

First of all, God's great mercy. Our hope is totally outside us. I love the description from verse 3. In his great mercy, in God's great mercy, he has given us new hope into a living hope.

This hope that we have is totally outside of us. It's not just the natural optimism that I have that things are going to be fine, but it's because there is a God who is in control, who is choosing to have mercy to us.

This God has shown his mercy. And there is a wonderful future ahead for all people who follow Jesus because there is a God who is in control. There is somebody who is outside, who is all good.

Much like an unwanted orphan who had no hope of being adopted, God shows his awesome kindness to us. And so the basis for our hope is not us.

[12 : 49] It is our God. Secondly, our hope comes from the resurrection. Our hope for new life comes from Jesus' resurrection, his physical and bodily resurrection as a historical event.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no hope for us. 1 Corinthians 15, if you want to go read that later, it's a wonderful reminder that without the resurrection, we are all wasting our time right now here in church.

It would be better to be in bed with a hot coffee and, I don't know, something on TV. But because of the resurrection, because of the resurrection, we can have hope, and so we're not wasting our time.

And Peter describes this hope wonderfully. It is not that we just have a vain hope. It's not even just confident expectation. It is a living hope.

It's a living hope because Jesus is alive. He was raised from the dead. He is living right now in heaven. And so our hope is in someone who is alive.

[13 : 56] And we wait to see him return. Thirdly, our new birth. In the resurrection of Jesus, we see Jesus come back to life.

And in his death on the cross, we die with him. And so when he is raised to life, we start a new life. When we have the Holy Spirit enter us and show us who Jesus is, we are born again, born into a new life.

A new person comes into being. And our hope is as sure as Jesus' resurrection. Jesus didn't just make life after death possible, but he made it sure.

And so the basis for our hope is summed up wonderfully in verse 3. God, in his kindness, has shown mercy to us through the resurrection of Jesus.

And we have new birth. And the hope we have is not vain or vague. It is alive. Because Jesus is the hope that is alive. And this hope can't die like other hopes in our culture.

[15 : 05] This hope can't get depressed. We might be feeling depressed. We might be feeling low. We might be struggling and looking for work. We might be struggling to pay bills. The culture might be getting worse around us.

But our hope for tomorrow is not based on those things. Because the hope for tomorrow is outside of us. It is objective. It is totally separate from us because it is the God who works.

It is God who in his mercy has shown us love. Who has brought us to new life. Our future is not based on us. And I'm incredibly thankful for that.

I would stuff it up. You would stuff it up. We would stuff it up as a society. Our society can't get things right. You even look at the vaccine implementation and the COVID response.

Some countries have had a really great response to COVID. Some countries have been able to lock down and minimize the spread of COVID. Some countries have had a really great rollout of the vaccine.

[16 : 07] Some countries have not had a great rollout of the vaccine. And so if our countries can't even get the rollout and response to a pandemic right, how are we supposed to place our hope in governments or society for tomorrow?

I'm really thankful that the hope for the future is not based in those. And I'm thankful it's not based in myself. The basis of our hope in the future is God and his kind mercy to us.

No one else can be trusted. Now, can you give an answer to the hope that you have? If I was going to put you on the spot right now and say, why do you believe in God?

You know, you've just walked out of church. You're on Fuller's Road and someone comes up to you with a microphone. They keep 1.5 from you. And say, why have you been at church? Why are you wasting your time there?

Can you give an answer to the hope you have? This is something Peter is really keen to do as he sends this letter. In chapter 3, he wants people to be able to explain the hope they have, give a defense for the hope they have.

[17 : 14] And I think verse 3 is a wonderful summary of the gospel. The hope I have is not based on me. It is based on God's mercy to me.

And it's all because of the resurrection. The resurrection is God showing that Jesus really was his son. It shows that he dealt with my sin and my death on the cross.

And because he is alive, I have a promise that I will be alive and I have a new birth. Verse 3, if you memorize that and somebody says, why do you go to church?

You can just bring out that. These three things in verse 3 of 1 Peter 1. There is a God who has had mercy. I believe in the resurrection. And I believe I'm a new person now because of it.

It's a very simple gospel message you can share to know your faith. So that is the basis for our hope. The basis for our hope is God. Not anything outside of us or a culture outside of us or within us.

[18 : 14] And Peter explains the hope that we can have for the future. Have a look with me. The second half of verse 3 into verse 4. To be born again, to have new life in Jesus because of the resurrection means that there's also an inheritance.

Something that we are waiting for. It's like money or property that gets assigned to us in someone's will when we follow Jesus as Lord. When we have new birth, we get adopted into God's family.

And also, we get an inheritance as being part of God's family. And this is a hope. This is inheritance that won't spoil. It won't fade. It won't perish.

My parents have just retired. My dad is also an Anglican minister. And they're moving out of their church house. And so they're downsizing.

And it's been like getting an inheritance while my parents are still alive. So that's kind of been fun. But it's not the really big things. It's not the house or the car. It's the things that aren't incredibly valuable but aren't worth throwing out.

[19 : 37] So it's the hundreds of books my dad has on Christian ministry. And so if you see my little red car, which is just out on the street, my boot is full of books at the moment. Because I haven't had time to sort through all of these books.

And there's all these other things that, do you know what? This part of the inheritance has spoiled. They have perished. They have faded. There's just so many things that are just being thrown out as my parents downsize.

There's so many of the books that dad gives me that were great 40 years ago. But there's better versions. There's newer things now. But the inheritance that God has for us will not spoil.

It will not perish and it will not fail. To be born again is to have the best inheritance. Something Dan touched on before. There's a lot of things we can put our hope in that do perish, spoil, and fade.

But our eternal hope with God in heaven, in relationship with him and in relationship together, in perfection, that cannot fade or fail or perish. Not only is this inheritance kept for us, but we are kept safe for it too.

[20 : 48] Verse 5. Who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. Not only do we have an inheritance that is kept safe, but we also are kept safe.

Having a secure inheritance wouldn't be any good if we were let to perish or to fade. But God has put a shield around us. And I really love this language of a shield.

It's something that's taken straight out of the Psalms. And I can't but help imagine a Roman legion. You know, I'm not sure if you've seen too many war movies, but I just get this picture of the Roman legion.

They've all got these giant red shields. And when there's an attack, they all lock the shields into each other. And they form like a turtle. And they put the shields above them so arrows can't get in. And it's just an impenetrable force.

And I think I just see this picture of God shielding us by his power as a wonderful reminder that God is keeping us. You know, he's got the shield. He's grabbed us by the collar.

[21 : 53] And he is dragging us to him. Maybe that's just the picture of me as I follow him. But God is keeping us safe until we see the salvation we are waiting for revealed.

I think it's another wonderful reminder, again, that our hope, our confident expectation for the future is not based upon us. It is based upon God.

It is only Jesus as our Savior who will take us to that finish line. And we are kept shielded by our faith. Our faith is a gift that God gives to us.

But our faith is something that we've also been speaking a lot about as a church. That our key objective as a church for the next five years is for us to be growing, trusting in God more and more each day.

Growing our faith. Placing our confident expectations of tomorrow safe into his hands. And what happens for us is that as I place my hopes for tomorrow, not in the things that fade, but as I place my hope for tomorrow into God's hands and I see how trustworthy he is, my faith and my trust in him grows more and more each day.

[23 : 08] One of the areas of hope that I've struggled in in recent times is how I view the future. I'm someone that loves to think about what is coming and to plan for it, and I find it much harder to be a person who is in the moment thinking about the day.

And so when it comes to thinking about the future, a large part of that is the house that I live in. And at the moment, it's impossible for me to buy a house in Chatswood.

You know, you look at recent house prices and they just keep going up. And I have a habit of looking at areas and looking where I could buy a house. And what I end up doing is placing my hope for tomorrow in bricks and mortar instead of in Jesus.

Thinking, you know what, if I had a house that I could live in, I would be secure. I would be safe. I had a roof over my head. I'd be able to take care of my family and that would be good. And that is good.

Those things are good. It is good to plan for the future. But there's also an idolizing of it. And this is what I was doing, thinking that if I had a house, I would be secure for the future.

[24 : 21] The basis for our hope is the new birth we have because of the resurrection of Jesus that we have seen because of God's good mercy to us. This hope is kept secure.

It is shielded by God and he keeps us shielded too. And so what does this mean for us now? Thirdly this morning, what is the impact of hope now for us?

Verse 6. In all this, you greatly rejoiced. Though now for a little while, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

The living hope that we have because of the resurrection brings joy to us now. And that's our experience. Our experience is to have joy even in trials.

And this church that Peter was writing to was facing a lot of trials. But the hope we have points beyond the difficult days, beyond the trials. Those trials and troubles will only last a little while.

[25 : 21] It may be just a lifetime. But our hope extends much further. Our hope and faith is actually strengthened by trials. Peter describes it here like gold being refined in a fire.

Difficult days should not surprise us or cause us to doubt God's goodness. But they are sent to strengthen us. Recently, I was speaking with someone who was struggling with doubts about God's goodness.

Their family was going through a particularly difficult season. And this person wanted to know, where is God? I've been praying to him. I've asked him for my help. Why hasn't he answered my prayer and taken away this season of suffering?

And I encourage them that God has answered their prayer. He may not have answered it in the way that they wanted, though. Because God does allow trials to come.

And they function like fire to perfect us, to make us like God. Making us reassess the things of this world. What am I hoping in? Am I hoping in things that will not last, like a house which can easily be knocked over?

[26 : 32] Or am I putting my hope, my confident expectation in tomorrow in God? And then we will shine like gold to his praise.

Our lives will always have trials and joys, sorrow and good times. When we think everything is going okay, times of grief come in like an uninvited guest.

And it makes joy far more complex. Because the days are both full of joy and of grief. To be a Christian full of hope does not mean that we pretend that we don't grieve.

God does not offer us a perfect life this side of Jesus' return. God promises difficult days. But it's important to remember that we don't just have happy days and we don't just have sad days.

If we think we are having a really happy day, then we haven't seen the news. And we haven't seen what is going on in the world around us. And if we think the day is terrible and it sucks, then we aren't living remembering how good God has been to us.

[27 : 43] One of my children expresses themselves in, I was going to say a bipolar way, but that's not quite right.

In words of either spectrum. For them, it's either the very best dinner or the worst dinner. There's not much in between. It's either a great day or it's the worst day of my life.

I'm not tempted on the good days or the good meals to say, actually, it's not that good a day. It's actually not good a meal. It's not that good a meal. You know, the KFC you're eating is actually not good for you.

Stop enjoying it so much. On the good days, I'm not tempted to bring them down a peg. But on the bad days, on the worst day of my life, on the it's the worst meal I've ever had, there's always a good reason to be rejoicing.

There's always a reason to be rejoicing. First of all, you've got food. You know, you've got a roof up. You're warm. You've got a God who loves you. You've got a family who loves you. Every day is a day to grieve.

[28 : 46] And every day is a day to be joyful. Because every day we have reasons for both. But when our hope is not fixed on what God has in store for us, we can lean to just grieve.

Or we can base our joy on things that do not last. The living hope we have in Jesus because of the resurrection enables us to put our hope in the future despite difficult days.

There's an author, a secular author. His name is Mark Manchin. He wrote a book about hope. It's called Everything is Bleep.

I won't tell you the title. It's inappropriate. But the author is deliberately provocative. And he writes about hope from a secular perspective. And he concludes writing about the perspective of nihilism.

That nothing matters. That the world is pointless. And he writes to conclude his book. That at the end of time, perhaps then, we will not only realize but fully embrace the uncomfortable truth.

[29 : 52] That we imagined our own importance. We invented our purpose. And we were and still are nothing. All along, we were nothing. And maybe then, only then, will the eternal cycle of hope and destruction come to an end.

Or, and that's where he leaves the book. Because without God, this is the logical conclusion. There is no hope. There is no meaning.

Everything we do is a waste of time. Society can't fix itself. I may as well stay at home and eat a bag of Doritos and pizza. But the basis for our hope is not from society.

It is not from within. Our basis for hope is the God who has given us a purpose. Who values us. Who has shown that we are not just nothing. But we are loved, precious children of his.

Made his children by the resurrection of Jesus. And today, we can rejoice even when we are grieving. Because our God has mercy on us and he loves us.

[31 : 00] Let me pray. Heavenly Father. Lord, you are truly wonderful. Lord, we can be distracted by the things around us.

By the things that we think will give us joy and hope. But Lord, they do not last. Lord, only you last and only you offer a true living hope that we can depend upon.

Heavenly Father, would you help us? Would you help us to review the things that we trust in, that don't work, that don't last? Help us to put our trust and our hope, our confident expectation in tomorrow firmly in your hands.

And Lord, would you help us to rejoice because of that? We ask this in your son's name. Amen.