

Hope for You

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[0 : 00] Thank you for you on this Good Friday. If I've not met you before, my name is Steve. I'm the senior pastor here at St. Paul's, and I'd be grateful if you could have John 19 open in front of you. And also, just for a bit of a heads up, John chapter 4 as well. You may need that as we go through too. Let me just jump straight in and say, Easter is what Christianity offers a world that is losing hope in its ability to fix itself. That's Easter. It's what Christianity offers you, you who cannot change, you who cannot find peace, cannot find security, cannot find hope, cannot find meaning. And so today and the next three Sundays, we as a church are going to be looking at hope and the hope that Easter offers this world. And already, Deb has indicated this time a year ago, we were in lockdown. We were not able to meet together as we are now because of

COVID-19. In the past year, we have been in the midst of the worst global pandemic in a century and hopes even now of an early solution and for life to go back to normal is dashed again and again and again and again. And the problem we know with this pandemic is not just sickness. Virtually every sector in society will be impacted and will feel the repercussions of COVID-19 for years to come.

And especially the vulnerable in our society. They will bear the greatest burden once again. Death, pandemics, injustice, family breakdown, social isolation, cancel culture, the threat of wars. None of it has stopped. None of it has stopped while we have faced a global enemy against the life of humanity. Which is confusing for us. In the West, particularly. For over two centuries now, Western societies like ours have put hope in the progressiveness of history. To put it simply, every day and in every way, we're getting better and better. And yet we're not.

It's the strong belief that came out of the age of enlightenment that every generation would experience a better world than the one before it. The assumption is that via human reason, ingenuity, science, once freed from the superstitions of beliefs from centuries past, we would have a better future future together. Now we should have learned that lesson. We haven't. We should have learned that lesson in the first four decades of the 20th century. In the space of four decades, we faced two world wars like we'd never seen before. A global pandemic and the Great Depression. In fact, in the 20th century alone, more people were killed in wars than all history prior combined.

[3 : 39] What followed those four decades was the Cold War and the threat of nuclear holocaust. And it seems that the greatest threat to our hope for a better world is not the natural environment around us, but the various forms of evil that spring from the heart of the human being.

Science could come up with a vaccine for COVID-19, but it can't eradicate human evil. Now by evil, I don't mean just the really big stuff like, you know, the Jewish Holocaust.

I mean the ordinary cruelties of self-interest day by day in business, racism, arrogance, pride, dishonesty, corruptions, abuse, sexism, the countless acts of selfishness that we all practice day by day.

And that brings me to Easter. And the hope for humanity. The word the Bible uses for hope is so much stronger than the one that's used in the English language.

It means a profound certainty. Profound certainty. Christians are profoundly certain, even in the midst of pandemics and hardships, that God is guiding every twist and every turn of their life towards the resurrection of their bodies and their souls for a new, eternal and perfect world where everything wrong doesn't exist.

[5 : 24] It's a profound certainty. And all of this profound, certain hope is fixed. All of it is fixed to the explosive three days where the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, happened around 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem, Israel.

In time, in space. It's a certain hope. And so my plan today is to take us into the beginnings of those events and really just focus on two things.

Two things that Jesus said on the cross in that Bible reading that was just read out to us. And the first of those things reveals the nature of the hope that Jesus offers us.

And the second thing that he says is how we can take up the hope that he offers us. So first of all, that's all I'm saying. Two things.

Take a little while, but two things. The nature of his hope, the nature of his offer of hope. At the end of the crucifixion. So this is John 19. If you want to dive into that, it'd be really helpful.

[6 : 41] John chapter 19, the end of his crucifixion account. We read this in verse 28. Later, knowing that everything had been finished.

And so that the scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty. Now, our first reaction to that is, well, of course he's thirsty.

I mean, you know, it's the Middle East. It's really sand and sun there. It's really hot. He's been crucified under the Middle Eastern sun. He's losing lots of fluid. In fact, one of the things that you died from in crucifixion was dehydration.

You died from dehydration amongst other things. And so, but if we linger over those words a little bit, we realize that in actual fact, it might be something significant that's happening here.

Maybe there's something a little bit deeper. We need to think about this. You see, because Jesus has suffered an awful lot up until this point, right? He has been beaten in the face with fists.

[7 : 47] He has been lashed with a whip across his back in such a way. His back looks like a chunk of steak. He's had tent pegs. No, no, no. You know, not three-inch nails.

He had tent pegs driven through his hands and his feet. He's had a crown of thorns squeezed over his head and lacerated his head.

He has endured all of that and he's not complained once. Not once. Not even a whimper.

He's accepted it. He's submitted to it. Not even an, ow, that hurt. Nothing. Nothing. So why now, why now at the end of all of that, does he say, actually I'm feeling thirsty.

There's something deeper going on here. Something a bit deeper than just mere, I need a drink. And what's going on deeper here is, is a connection to something happened that much earlier in John's gospel, in John chapter four.

[9 : 01] Early in this biography, Jesus encounters a woman at a well. She's a Samaritan woman. And she is a mortal enemy of the Jewish people in the first century.

And she is surprised, as she goes to draw water from the well, that Jesus says to her, a mortal enemy, can you give me a drink? Jesus says to her in chapter four, verse 13, everyone who drinks from this water, the water that you will draw from this well, will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks the water that I give them, will never thirst again. Indeed, the water that I give them, will become in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.

So again, even as he asked for a drink of water in John four, he's talking about here something that's much deeper than mere physical thirst. That's because in the Bible, thirst is a metaphor for emptiness.

It's a metaphor for spiritual emptiness that comes when we do not put God, our creator, at the center of our life.

[10 : 19] For instance, Psalm 42, as the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Where can I go and meet with him? You see, it's one thing to believe that God exists, as the vast majority of our world still does.

But it's quite another thing to have him as the central reality of your life. It's not belief in God, an intellectual assent that God exists, that our souls need so much as meeting God, knowing God, experiencing God.

Without meeting, knowing, experiencing God, without him being the central reality of our life, we thirst. We die.

That is, it's possible to have a belief in God, but have something else as the central defining reality for your life. If I may continue this metaphor a little bit more, these other things, success, approval, comfort, friendship, family, sex and romance, influence, money, a whole range of things, power, the actual drink that we are pouring into our souls to quench the thirst, the emptiness that we feel on the inside.

[11 : 57] We are hoping that these things will fill us up and satisfy us and give us hope. And the point that Jesus is getting to is if we attempt to quench the thirst of our soul with anything else than the love and the beauty and the comfort of God in Jesus Christ, then we will thirst again and again and again and again forever.

Only God in Jesus can fully and satisfyingly quench the thirst of our emptiness. Everything else is like drinking seawater.

It just simply makes you more thirsty. And so back in John 4 and Jesus meeting with this Samaritan woman, Jesus says, the water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

And so the woman hears this and he goes, Sir, give me that water right there. Give me that water so that I don't thirst and I don't have to keep coming here, drinking, you know, drawing the water here.

What's amazing here, Jesus wants to give it. She immediately wants it and then Jesus doesn't give it to her. Not straight away.

[13 : 18] Instead, what appears to happen is that Jesus seems to change the subject in John 4. He says to her, well, go and get your husband.

And her reply is, well, actually, I don't have a husband. And Jesus says, you're absolutely right. You have no husband. The fact is, you've had five husbands and the man you're currently with is not even your husband.

She wants to take up the offer of eternal life. He changes the subject. Brings up her broken, messed up love life. Why? What are you doing, Jesus?

Why be so harsh at this point with her? Why change the subject and be so harsh? And yet he isn't. He isn't changing the subject.

And he's being incredibly tender. He's pointing out to her that all her messed up love life is simply a result of her looking to men to give her what only God can give her.

[14 : 29] To use the metaphor again, her life has revealed she's been drinking sea water all her life in the form of relationships with blokes.

and she is thirsty. She is never satisfied. And Jesus offers her fresh water that will fill her up and satisfy her forever.

The reason her life is going so poorly is because when we look to someone or something other than God for the love and the significance and the beauty and the security and the hope, we will thirst again and again and again and again because it will never ever satisfy.

satisfy. You will thirst for eternity if you live your life that way. What she needed was God as the living reality at the center of her life.

She needed to have the love of God at the center of her life so she didn't need to look to the love of men to give her what only God can give her to truly satisfy her. So Jesus was not so much confronting her but in actual fact lovingly convicting her and putting her to a greater hope.

[15 : 51] And what is interesting about this Samaritan woman is that she had belief in God but it wasn't enough. Jesus wasn't the center of her life.

God was not the defining reality of her life and Jesus in this encounter helped her to see it. Other things were more important. That's the background of John 19 so let's just flick back now to John 19 and the crucifixion of Jesus.

That is the reason why Jesus is thirsty. His thirst is a picture of what he is really going through on the cross.

On the cross Jesus Christ is experiencing the ultimate thirst as the prophet Nahum in the Old Testament. Centuries before he put it like this. Who can withstand his indignation?

Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire. On the cross Jesus was getting what the whole human race deserved for putting its evil in putting everything else apart from God at the center of their lives.

[17 : 08] He was getting what we deserve for our life of ignoring our created God. He was experiencing the divine justice. It was like a million Middle Eastern sons burning down on him.

He is thirsting thirsting in our place so that we can have living water. He is dying of spiritual thirst. He is being emptied.

The one who was always full was being emptied so that we can be filled. He is experiencing the agony of being separated from God the fountain of living water so that we can have direct access to

the fountain of eternal living water.

Jesus experienced the agony of separation of love from his father. The experience of his fire of judgment so that we can experience his presence and love and the never ending refreshment of the water of eternal life.

He got what we deserve so that we can get what only he rightly deserves. He suffered so that we can have a river of life welling up.

[18 : 22] That is his favour, his love, his approval, his acceptance. That is the nature of his offer of hope for us this Good Friday.

So secondly, how do we take it up? The last thing that Jesus breathes on the cross, the last thing he says is in verse 30. It is finished.

Now Jesus is using a word here that means totally paid for. Totally paid for. It's a word that you used to write across an account in the first century.

Paid in full. See, one of the great and wonderful paradoxes of history is that here on the cross just outside of Jerusalem is the helpless, powerless, almost dead, dependent Jesus on a cross and his last words that he uttered, I did it.

I've triumphed, I've accomplished it, it's finished. And what he's accomplished for us, what he describes, is beautifully described for us a little bit later in the New Testament.

[19 : 55] It says, Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. You see, there's this infinite chasm between us and God and Jesus has done everything required.

He has paid every debt that we owe to God, dealt with every single bit of shame and guilt and sin. He's accomplished it all, there's nothing more to pay.

There is nothing more that we have to do to bridge the gap between us and God. And so contrast, contrast Jesus' last word here with the last word of Buddha.

The last word of Buddha, strive without ceasing. Jesus, it's finished.

I've thirsted for you and it is finished versus strive without ceasing. ceasing. Now let me say, there's a lot of admirable things about Buddhism, like the self-denial and the recognition that selfishness is one of humanity's biggest problems.

[21 : 15] problems. But if you know anything about Buddhism, you would know that the eightfold path of Buddhism is extremely hard and incredibly demanding and you would never actually have hoped that you've done enough.

Strive without ceasing. Keep going and you may get enlightenment. fulfillment. That's why these last words of Jesus here is so important.

I've done all the striving for you. I've done everything to bring you to salvation. I've thirsted so that you might be fully satisfied.

Religion is where you give God a performance and hope and hope and hope that he might wishful thinking, that he may in fact bless you. The core message of Christianity, the core message of Easter, the good news of Easter, which is why it's called Good Friday, is that God blesses us in Jesus Christ and we get to live, to love and serve him, the only one who has already given us every love, every blessing and every acceptance.

Jesus has done it all, fulfilled it all. Any effort on our behalf to make his completed, finished work any better actually makes it worse.

[22 : 44] Anything that we think we contribute makes it worse. It unpacks it, any effort, any striving. When Jesus says it is finished, what he actually means is it is finished.

finished, we cannot receive his salvation and act as if we can add to it. So let me just go on a little bit of a tangent here.

There are two kinds of people in this world who attempt to add to the finished work of Jesus.

There's the one kind of person is the beat myself up person and the other person is prove myself person.

There's the self-beaters and the self-provers and all of us on one way or another on a scale there.

The self-beater is the one every time someone criticizes, they are just going to crumble.

They are devastated and they beat themselves up. Every time they do something wrong and make a mistake, they beat themselves up. In fact, it's quite possible that you did something 30 years ago and you're still beating yourself up about it.

[23 : 58] You cannot get past it. You feel bad about it. In fact, you only feel good about yourself when you are feeling bad about yourself. You're a beat yourself up person and you need to know this Good Friday that Jesus was beaten up from you and it was finished.

He paid for your sins. Why do you still keep trying to pay for them? It is finished attempting to add anything to what Jesus done simply detracts from it.

The other person is the self-prover. They usually feel much better about themselves than the self-beater. They're often proud, self-made person.

You've done a little bit of success in life, you think it means something. The need to have money, success, possessions, family, career, in order to feel secure and significant means you are trying to add to Jesus' work to make us all secure and acceptable.

The message of Christianity is that we are all, every single one of us, is a sinner saved by grace if we trust in the finished work of Jesus who has thirsted for us.

[25 : 18] what Christianity tells us, what Isa tells us, is our hearts are more evil than we ever dare to believe.

That's what the cross tells us. Our hearts are more evil than we ever dare to believe and we are more loved than we ever dare hope or imagine.

At exactly the same time, the person who tries to prove themselves doesn't understand that they can never do it because in fact they are more evil than they could ever possibly imagine.

Conversely, people constantly trying to atone for their flaws by beating themselves up never will because they are already loved and affirmed more than their wildest dreams could ever hope.

God humbles the one and affirms the other. It is finished. Jesus' death on the cross doesn't make us a contributor to our salvation.

[26 : 24] It is our salvation. All of our overwork and anxiety and constant striving, our lack of gratitude and rejoicing is because we do not know that it is finished.

It's done. the amazing truth of Easter is summarised really succinctly in a little bit later in the New Testament.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and he did it.

It's finished. is there any more wonderful news for people like us who know we cannot measure up to the demands of our own conscience, let alone the demands of our own holiness, while still living in fear of what this future of this world might hold.

Easter is full of hope for the self-beaters and the self-provers. it is full of hope for you. It is finished in Jesus.

[27 : 40] So see your need met in him and centre your life on him. The hope of Easter is summed up so wonderfully and possibly the most famous Bible verse of all.

God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have. eternal life. One of the things that we get to do as a bunch of people gathered in a room like this today is to celebrate in a visual form the death and the resurrection of Jesus with the communion elements.

We get to do this together, have a physical reminder of the hope that we have in Easter. Can I just say that if you are someone who trusts in the Lord Jesus, you are someone who got your life centred on Christ right now, then I would invite you to participate in these elements right now.

If you are someone who is with us today and you are just not sure where you are or if you might be clear you don't know where you are, can I just encourage you to let these elements go past you?

Take this opportunity right now to reflect on what we have just seen in John 4 and John 19 and find that the thirst of your soul is only ever satisfied in Jesus Christ.

And as we receive these elements, bow your head and receive Christ for the first time. Do that today. But acknowledging that we are flawed and we are sinful people, up on the screen, we're going to say a prayer together acknowledging our need for no, it's not on the screen.

[29 : 32] So let me instead lead us in that prayer. Bow your heads. This is for the kids amongst us as well, so I've sort of made it easier for them to grapple with some of this language.

Oh Father God, we are sorry for living, for ourselves, for loving other things, other people more than we love you, and forgetting to pray and asking you to forgive our sins.

Father, forgive us. Wipe away our guilt and our sadness. Take away our shame. Change our hearts to love what you love and to turn away from what you hate.

Thank you for your love, for your never-stopping, unbreaking, unbreaking, always and forever love.
Thank you for our life of freedom that we have because Jesus died.
Thank you for our hope in Jesus that never changes, that never fades away. Thank you in Jesus
that we never thirst and are fully satisfied forever in such a way that the well of water of life just
flows into us.
[30 : 52] And so in Jesus name we give you thanks. Amen.