

Vision Series 2023

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Preacher: John Lau

[0 : 00] As Steve has already mentioned, a few more days will be Good Friday and Easter, marking the suffering and death of Christ Jesus on the cross and his burial and resurrection.

The event of Easter is significant not just for Christians, but for every human. It's the heart of the gospel, the good news that Christians proclaim.

It's where humans find hope to face the most unchangeable, and inevitable threats of human life, our destiny. Humans all want to know where we are going and heading.

Our ability to put up with the journey increases according to how desirable the destiny is.

That ability increases as we age, but our entitlement to the question, are we there yet, decreases.

[1 : 05] Repeated by a three-year-old, which is over there joining his church, that question is cute but irritating. However, if a 50-year-old man like myself, growing up, keep asking this question, it's just irritable, and most likely will kick me out of your car.

Humans need to organize the sequence of individual sensations and life experience into a particular story. When that story leads somewhere, it gives us hope.

Making sense of our destination gives us meaning. What we believe about our future completely controls how we experience our present.

So how do we make sense of the unchangeable and inevitable fact that people are destined to die once? How do we have a human hope that can make sense of death and stand up to it and help us to face a fear of death, even triumph over it?

Christians believe Jesus is all about hope, and in Jesus is a hope that can face anything. One of the crucial parts of the Christian story has always been deliverance from death through Christ.

[2 : 27] The Bible is full of passage, like what we have just read from Romans 8 and 2 Timothy 1. Jesus is a savior of the world who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

He saved humans in the hope of redemption and adoption to be God's children. But before we look at Christian hope, let's look at how our society addresses the topic of hope or the lack of it, in particular with death.

And after that, we'll look at three characters of Christian hope. So, when it comes to hope and comes to our life and the inevitable destination of death, not many people will be chomping at the bit to ask, are we there yet?

Death is a topic that many people would like to avoid because generally, we feel fearful and sad and hopeless about the matter.

I came across a TED Talk by Stephen Cave. He's a philosopher and the author of the book *Immortality, The Quest to Live Forever and How It Drives Civilization*.

[3 : 46] His TED Talk talks about four stories humans tell themselves to help us cope with the fear of death. Every culture in human history has some story about some magic potion of fountains of youth that promise we can live forever.

Ancient Egypt, India, and the Chinese have this kind of story. And the contemporary will tell this story on the belief that science will conquer death.

But if you look through history, the only thing in common for all those people that have taken the potion is that they're all still lying in the grave. Realizing we cannot escape death that we tell a restoration story of somehow people can raise up and live again.

Christians, Jews, and Muslims share these orthodox beliefs. And we invent this story in the scientific age into freezing our body until technology and medicine is advanced enough to deal with our ill body.

Too many people who tell this story religion is a coping mechanism for our hopeless world. Another story that we tell ourselves is that we get to leave our body behind, to live on as a spirit or soul to avoid the messiness and problems of having a physical body.

[5 : 22] And again, in our digital age, we upload our mind on the computer to live as an avatar after we die. Or lastly, we can live on to immortality in our legacy through people thinking or telling about us.

Living on in the memories of the living. I remember this perspective. This is the perspective of my parents as I grew up. the demand of the living to keep the dead alive knows no cultural difference. Many cultures emphasize the importance of getting married and having children or for having a biological legacy. Suppose you're single or a parent with mature kids.

Have you bought into this idea of the secular society which feeds our hopelessness? All these stories are humans trying to create hope with their actions.

Hope by doing. Cave's conclusion is very typical of many philosophers of our day and age. He used the method of a book.

[6 : 41] Just as a book is spun by its cover by the beginning and end, so are life are bound by birth and death. The characters within it know no horizon.

They only know the moment that make up their story even when the book is closed. It makes no sense for you to feel what is outside of this cover whether before your birth or after your death. And you needn't worry how long the book is or whether it's a comic strip or an epic. The only thing that matters is that you make it a good story.

When dealing with the terror of death many people have taken on to live out a good life story by living out their life's desires. Others will focus on the part of life that they can control to live every day to the fullest.

What is your approach to life? people may be willing to agree that death remains something to be feared because it's the end of our existence and all that we have worked for in life.

[7 : 53] Death is violently imposing unconsciousness on someone which is considered a crime. Death is an intuition of life that somewhat and always only appears because something has gone wrong.

There's nothing natural about death. Some contemporary thinkers try to neutralize the terror of death by treating it as an inevitable step of life.

This account's most favorite popular culture expression is in The Lion King. A young lion is told that though lion eat the antelope they eventually die and fertilize the grass and the antelope eat the grass.

So it all connected in a great circle of life. On the surface there is something attractive about this circle of life approach.

Our life will contribute to something to value something no matter how many failures or mistakes we have made. But if you think deeply think deeper it's being recycled fertilizer how you want others to summarize your life.

[9 : 12] But that is what our popular culture encourages us to do to deal with the unchangeable inevitable effects of human destiny or to accept hope or to have hope is just to accept the inevitability of life.

atheists philosophers often consider religious people less enlightened and primitive because they rely on something supernatural that cannot empirically prove to exist.

However they also cannot verify that God does not exist. Secular thinkers seem to believe we can rationalize the terror and fear we feel about death by insisting that death is nothing to be afraid of.

But even a very young kid realizes death is fearful because it means the end of love. Death tears us away from those we love from the relationships that make life meaningful.

We feel death because also because we are not sure that death is the end. No one has been through death and come back to tell us what is on the other side.

[10 : 31] All is there, no one. Christianity tells a different resurrection story because Jesus is the person that has conquered death.

Christian hope explains why we feel death is so unnatural and help us to face even triumph over it. Death feels unnatural because it's not part of God's original design.

The book of Genesis explains that God did not create humans to age, weaken, fade, or die. We were not made for love relationship that ends in death.

Death is an intrusion resulting from sin and our human race turning away from God. But God has not turned away from us. The New Testament letter to the Hebrews explains that God sent Jesus the immortal son of God into the world.

Shame is in our humanity and becoming subject to weakness and death so that by his death he may break the power of him who holds the power of death and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

[11 : 49] God solved our dilemma of being trapped in sin and death by becoming our substitute. Jesus went before us to the cross to pay for the punishment of us turning away from God.

This coming Friday is Good Friday followed by Easter Sunday. We'll speak more about the Christian resurrection story and how Jesus broke death and power over us by dying in our place and pay our penalty.

God saved Christian in the hope of being fully adopted as his children and in the hope of full redemption of our bodies.

Christian hope does not only address where we are going and give us hope for life after death. Christian hope has also three distinct and unique characteristics.

It is personal, concrete, and fulfilling. Christian hope is personal because Jesus told us in John 14 2 that he was going to his father's house to prepare a place for us.

[12 : 59] We call that place heaven. What mean imagery do you have when you think of heaven? Would it be a picture of people dressed in white robe floating on clouds with halos?

There's the common misunderstanding of heaven being a consumer paradise where all the pleasure and comfort human thoughts to buy on earth are now free for grabs and popular religious imagination thinks of heaven as a trouble-free place of ease.

I believe secular thinkers have some merit in challenging the religious view of heaven especially since many religious people live a moral life legalistically mainly to have entry to heaven but secular thinkers and religious people do not know what heaven or Christian hope is about.

18th century philosopher and preacher Jonathan Edward wrote a sermon titled Heaven is a world of love which powerfully conveys what Christian hope is about.

I have included a link to this address in the description of our live stream. I also have a couple of copies at the back. You must read this sermon to ensure you do not mistake what Christian hope is all about.

[14 : 33] The ultimate Christian hope is not some radiance or immortality but a relationship. At the center of heaven is a triune God.

One God in three persons Father Son and Holy Spirit united in infinitely dear and incomprehensible mutual love.

The three in one God continuously pour love into one another in joy and delight becoming like a fountain of love that open without any obstacle to hinder access and overflow to the world.

At work characterise the most loving relationship you have experienced in this world as a highly clogged pipe compared to heaven.

All earthly relationship are clogged plight that only a tiny amount of polluted water comes through because of our sin and weakness. we will see the great fountain of love in Christ in person.

[15 : 44] We shall know Christ Jesus' love far beyond what we have perceived and he has loved us with a dying love. The love between the triune God one God in three persons and the love between God and every human is the heart and core of Christian hope.

nothing is more transforming than when someone makes a powerful declaration to express an expression of love towards us.

And Jesus did that two thousand years ago. In this world we do not have a perfect holy and utterly other centered relationship.

So it is suitable for us to hope and long for one. We hope for it because we have not seen it. Like Romans 8 24 to 25 say hope that is seen is not hope at all.

Who hopes for what they already have? But if you hope for what we do not yet have, wait for it patiently. In Christ, God demonstrates his love and acceptance for you beyond what we can understand or imagine.

[16 : 53] He personally ensured our entry to heaven so that we can experience the divine love. Christ has spoken the claim of sin on us through his suffering and death.

We might physically die, but death become only an entry way to eternal life with Christ. Christian hope is also concrete.

We must also remember that eternal life that the Bible promised is not simply that we live forever in an immaterial spiritual paradise, removed from this world.

The salvation of this world we live in is what Christians hope for along with our soul and bodies which is why Christian hope is concrete. Chapter 21 and 22 of Revelation where Steve let us just stand in prayer describe the end of history.

We do not ascend to heaven but God's heavenly glory and purifying beauty and power descend to renew this material world. Evil, suffering, aging, disease, poverty, injustice, and pain are forever removed.

[18 : 15] Christians look forward to the redemption of their body and soul as in Romans 8.23 resurrecting into a new body as Jesus did. Christian hope promised that we will not simply get our life back but the one that we have will get back a life that we always long for and which we have never achieved.

Christianity is the only religion that holds our hope for the salvation of this world along with our souls and body and it's not a thing that will get even better get eventually better hope Christian hope is concrete as concrete as the resurrection event a couple thousand years ago Jesus Christ resurrection has torn the barrier between the ideal and the real and provide a concrete hope to many done and old people it helps them to say now I have got something I have hope I have hope for the future in Jesus the reality of resurrection helps the downtrodden of the world to get the justice that will not turn them the oppressed into an oppressor it can do so because it is not a consolation of for life loss in this world but a restoration all of the fundamental reason

Christian hope is concrete is because God has given us the Holy Spirit as our helper Romans 2 28 tell us that the Spirit help us in our weakness and the Spirit himself intercedes for us and also in 2 Timothy 1 7 says for the Spirit God gave us do not make us timid but give us power love and self discipline Christians have the Holy Spirit a person in a three in one God as a pipe that channels God's love to us the experience of God's love help us to love even our enemies or those that oppress us this spiritual pipe this Holy Spirit pipe is not and never will be clogged because Christians are saved and called to a holy life not because of anything we have done but because of God's purpose and grace and what

Jesus has done for us Christian hope is not about what you have done or need to do but what is done for you in Jesus Jesus has already loved your enemy for you Jesus has already loved your neighbor as how you would love yourself that is how you will change yourself and change the world Christian believe this world is made to be a paradise but it has been lost and the book of Genesis tell us that before the world was lost God saw everything he created including humans in his image as good and that's why Christian hope is fulfilling the image of God is in the DNA of every human some people realize that this fact embraced a true identity and became Christian others maintain a skeptic or call themselves an atheist but for however long they have tried has failed to prove God does not exist King Solomon is known to be the wisest king ever on earth and he wrote in Ecclesiastic chapter 3 10 to 11 that I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race he has made everything beautiful in this time he has also set eternity in the human heart yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end you will have a longing in you some deep and unfulfilling desire if eternity is not in your heart if eternity is not in your human heart you see every beautiful thing in the creation while seeing at the same time how sin tainted the inside of you it is such a burden on the human race to face a reality of this mismatch the gospel of

[23 : 15] Jesus Christ is by his resurrection he has lifted the burden he has removed the stink of death and sin and restored eternity in the human heart Christian hope is fulfilling because the hole in your heart is finally filled with the right stuff that pumps the nutrients your body need to thrive and grow there is no longer a heart in your heart that causes shortness of breath or restricting your movement you can leap walk run and sprint you can live out the life Jesus gives you and have it to the full as God originally designed it to be as said in John 10 10 Christian he offers salvation as a gift that is not conditioned on us living a morally good and religiously observant life salvation and eternity do not belong to the good people but to those who will admit they are not good enough and need a savior those hoping to be right with

God will get what they want because Roman 5 5 said hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us