

Resurrection Hope

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 0 0] Well, happy Easter everyone. My name is Steve Jeffrey. I'm the senior pastor here at St. Paul's and what a fantastic day for you to be tuning in to St. Paul's and to be engaging with the wonderful news of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is a day that marks all days. This is the day that celebrates, that remembers the most significant historical event ever.

This is the one that changes the course of history. And yet I acknowledge that for some, that is not the case. In fact, a Sydney newspaper printed an article in its Easter edition a number of years ago now. And the author, a social commentator made this comment about Easter and about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, you know, it is a positive comment. It says Christians celebrate new life at Easter, but in a religious sense. The focus of their festival is the belief that tragedy and grief symbolized by the crucifixion can give way to new life, which is symbolized by the resurrection. And that pain and loss are essential steps on the journey towards enlightenment. And so the author suggests there that Easter is a festival of hope, a celebration of faith in the future, a reminder that despite our failures and our frailties and our flaws, personal resurrection is a possibility for any of us. And so for the author of that article, a positive article, the resurrection of Jesus is in fact symbolic. Whether it happened or not is irrelevant for him. It's an example. It's a metaphor for life, for new life and growth through suffering. And so for some, a day like today is a great day, a metaphor for hope beyond potentially things like coronavirus. The author represents the view of many in our society when it comes to the resurrection. And it appears to be an intelligent, conciliatory and a rational view for them. The resurrection is a myth that it's okay to believe if it happens to work for you.

If it helps you in life, then believe the resurrection. Now, if you've tuned into us today, I want you to know from me right from the start, that as I look at the Bible and as I speak about the resurrection of Jesus this morning, I'm not merely putting another alternative in front of you. I'm not putting in front of you a support system for life. The resurrection of Jesus is not for me a satisfying myth that helps me interpret life and helps me live life so that it becomes livable and even enjoyable.

When I look at the Bible, when I speak about the resurrection this morning, Easter is about real persons, historical events and divine intentions that actually happened.

The resurrection is more real and it's more exciting and more terrifying and more life-changing than any myth or any other truth claim in the history of the world.

[3 : 5 0] That's my starting point. This Easter, the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, he's alive.

He's not a memory. A mere historical figure like Caesar or Shakespeare or Abraham Lincoln. He is back from the dead with a glorious eternal body. He's alive and he's reigning right now as the king of the universe and he's making this offer of real, genuine, eternal life and hope to everyone who hears me speak these words today.

You. So, I've got three things in mind this morning. This is my introduction. Three things in mind and if you've got the St. Paul's app in front of you and if you haven't, I'd encourage you to get there.

Go to St. Paul's app and open it up and you'll find some outline there for my message today. I've got three things in mind. Three things that the resurrection does for us from Mark that just read out to us.

[5 : 0 6] It changes our minds. It challenges our minds and reshapes our worldview. It changes our hearts and it gives us hope and it changes the whole course of our lives.

So, first of all, challenging minds and reshaping worldviews. Now, the challenge to our mind about the resurrection is there in Mark chapter 16 verse 6.

Right there. Don't be alarmed, he said. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene. He was crucified.

He has risen. He's not here and see the place where they laid him. And so, the challenge for our minds is that Jesus, who was dead, came back to life after he was dead.

Now, the fact that he was dead, the fact that Jesus was crucified, that's not unusual. You know, around Jesus' time in first century Palestine, there were dozens of these little movements where there was a leader who gathered a bunch of people behind him and they declared that they were the savior of the world.

[6 : 19] And, you know, it sort of worked for a bit until in every other case, including the case with Jesus, the leader was killed.

They were executed. And in every other case, except for the one with Jesus as its head, they just collapsed and went home. The movement's finished.

With the leader dead, everyone just simply went back to life. Except this one led by Jesus.

Only one movement didn't collapse with the death of its leader. In fact, it exploded with the death of its leader. Within 200 years, Christianity was dominant in the Roman Empire.

And to this day, right now, it is the largest and the most widely spread culturally and geographically of all religious faiths.

[7 : 20] So what's the difference? The Bible says the Christian church has maintained and claimed for 2000 years that after Jesus was killed, he came back to life and he appeared to his followers and many others.

That is, the resurrection of Jesus is what changes everything. The Bible says that's why Jesus' followers didn't go home.

That's why Christianity exploded and continues to do so. But this is the year 2020. You know, I live in Chatswood.

It's one of the major centers of the secular city of Sydney. And most people around me don't believe what I've just said. And, you know, I get that. I understand that.

You know, this is a challenge to our mind and challenge to our worldviews after all. And so, let me just say, I want to say this gently. It's really important not to be intellectually lazy at this point.

[8 : 27] Dismiss the resurrection as implausible. And you have to come up with an alternative explanation as to how this one little movement exploded like it did and penetrated globally into all different kinds of socioeconomic groups and cultures and languages.

But the others didn't. Many want to dismiss the resurrection without coming up with a historically plausible alternative explanations for it.

So, one historical tactic is to accuse the original texts, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which we've read from a couple of them this morning, as being unreliable.

Some prefer to call the historical documents legends. And our Bible reading, which is read out to us from Mark 15 and into 16, challenges that too.

So, if you've got that open, that would be fantastic. Three times in eight verses, I want you to see this. Mark 15 verse 40. Mark 15 verse 47.

[9 : 45] Mark 16 verse 47. Mark writes down the names of the eyewitnesses to the resurrection.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Why? Why three times? Well, the answer of one New Testament scholar is that this has all the marks of the way that historians did history in the first century.

These women are clearly described here as eyewitnesses. Have a look at the text with me. At Mark 15 verse 40, some women were watching. And again, 15 verse 47.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph's saw where he was laid. 16 verse 4. When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

Then in verse 5. As they entered the tomb, they saw. And then in verse 6. See the place where they laid him. It's pretty obvious that Mark sees these women as clear eyewitnesses to not just the death and the burial, but also the resurrection of Jesus.

[11 : 10] But let's not forget this is first century Palestine. Really crucial for us to keep it in its context. And this itself creates a problem.

You see, one of the early arguments against the truth of Christianity and the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus is that it's based on the eyewitness testimony of women.

A first century Greek philosopher named Celsus was one of the early and probably fiercest opponents of Christianity.

And he wrote that the resurrection was clearly a lie because women were the eyewitnesses. And women, according to him and the culture of that time, were regarded as hysterical and unreliable. And so the question is, if Mark is making all this up, and Matthew, Luke, John as well, if they're making it up, why would they have put women down?

[12:20] Why would they have recorded women as the only eyewitnesses to Jesus' empty tomb? The only way to account for the women being recorded as the eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection is that they were.

And that they were writing history, not legend. Mark has written this as an historical record of actual events.

Events that challenge the way we see the world. Now, at this point, it's easy to go, well, okay. It may have happened in their mind.

You know, ancient people, a little bit gullible when it came to miracles. They don't have our modern, developed mind. And we've learned a thing or two in the past 2,000 years.

See, it's easy to assume that their worldview was different than our worldview. Like, in the first century, they were gullible. And they were open to the idea of a resurrection where we're clearly not in our modern, developed mind.

[13:32] And again, if you look at Mark, got that text in front of you, you see that Mark challenges us not to be too quick here, to jump in and conclude that they were ignorant and gullible. One thing you'll notice as you read through Mark is that Jesus himself tells his disciples quite earlier on, quite clearly, that he will die and that he will rise again on the third day.

He does it in chapter 8 and he does it in chapter 10. And the weird thing is the third day comes after his death. It arrives. It's the third day.

And it seems that no one is expecting the resurrection. The men are sleeping in or something. And the women have bought spices in their Woolworths home delivery.

And it's a traditional thing that you did. You went and anointed a dead body with spices. And so they've got the spices. And even the disciples of Jesus aren't sitting around at breakfast time, eating their Weet-Bix and going, Hey guys, you know, it's the third day.

Do you think we should just go and have a look? Just check it out. Just in case. Even as these women are going to their tomb, they're wondering who's going to open the stone.

[14:50] Who's going to roll it away from them. They've prepared everything except how to get in. The resurrection, the point is, the resurrection took everyone by surprise.

The resurrection was just as impossible for them to believe as it is for us today. Even their first thought at seeing the empty tomb was not that Jesus had resurrected from, had been risen and come back to life.

But that someone had stolen the body. So I just want to say to you, wherever you're sitting now, is that if you doubt the resurrection of Jesus, I want to say, so did they.

So did they. But they did allow the evidence to challenge their worldview. We need to be careful of what the Oxford Don C.S. Lewis called chronological snobbery.

It's where we think that those have gone before us, especially those who have gone a long time before us, were just naive and gullible and stupid. They just believe anything.

[16:04] We need to be careful that our chronological snobbery isn't an excuse for intellectual laziness and narrow worldview assumptions ourselves.

Doubting the validity of the resurrection is okay. But at least have an open mind to the evidence.

But also, if you want to write it off as implausible, then at least for integrity's sake, come up with an alternative, historically plausible reason why this little group exploded to all corners of the globe and changed the world for over 20 centuries.

It did not die with the crucifixion of Jesus. The Christians, the Romans, and the Jews all agreed that the tomb where they laid the dead body of Jesus was empty after three days.

So what happened to the body? Why did hundreds of people claim to have seen him resurrection at the risk of their own life?

Why couldn't the opponents of Christianity produce the body? Why did these early Christians joyfully give their lives to see this message of the resurrected Jesus spread to the ends of the earth?

[17:44] So allow your worldview to be challenged. If you do allow your worldview to be challenged, then there's a word of mercy here.

Changing hearts and receiving hope. There's a word of mercy and grace to your heart. This is why looking at the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus is so essential for us. It's crucial for us. This historical event is not just an intellectual exercise of historical evidence that shapes our worldview. It's about mercy. It's about grace. And it's about hope for your lives right now in 2020.

Look at this wonderful word of grace and mercy. Have a look. Mark chapter 16, verse 7. Go tell his disciples and Peter, he is going ahead of you into Galilee.

There you will see him just as he told you. Notice what the women were not told. They were not told, you go back there and you tell those faithless, backstabbing, cowardly disciples of Jesus that if they pull their socks up, they may well see him.

[19 : 06] If they come back to him and they groveled to him and they had better grovel, if they have any hope of Jesus reinstating the movement, then they better come back and grovel.

That's not what was said here at all. Of course, that would have been warranted given what they had done to Jesus in abandoning him. But Jesus doesn't work the way you and I work.

He's forgiving them. He's calling them back to himself even before they had even taken any steps to repent. You see, this is a word of mercy and grace and forgiveness.

But notice the biggest word of grace here is simply the name Peter. You see, there's a whole bunch of disciples. But Peter gets a special mention.

And this is so incredible. Peter, he's the one who said, I will never disown you, Jesus. I will die before I disown you. And yet he denies Jesus three times in his hour of need.

[20 : 11] Jesus is arrested. And Peter, one of his keenest supporters, abandons him. It's a terrible betrayal by Peter. He turns his back on God and he runs to save his skin.

And so if the word to these women was simply go and tell the disciples and they had relayed that message to the disciples, Peter may well have sat in the corner and gone, this is not for me.

This is not for me. My betrayal is too great. And yet the word of Jesus through these angels to these women, to Peter is that I have plans for you, Peter, as well.

He was the biggest screw up. And he becomes the biggest of the leaders in the early days of the church. His screw up the biggest, his repentance the deepest, and his grasp of God's mercy and grace to him in Jesus the greatest.

And that is the good news of Christianity. This is why it's mercy and grace to us. This is the good news of Easter Day, that salvation is by grace.

[21 : 24] It's not by our works. It's not by our effort. It's not by our strength. Salvation comes to us by the witness of Jesus Christ dying on the cross. Salvation comes to us by Jesus when we admit our inability and our weakness and our failure, when we admit that we need a savior.

Jesus, the resurrected king, is the savior that we need. Forgiveness is offered to Peter.

It's offered to us with the resurrection of Jesus. You see, when a criminal completes a jail sentence, they fully, completely, totally satisfy the sentence.

And when they walk out of prison, what the law has no more claim on them. They've paid the penalty. They've paid the debt. They are now free. And Jesus Christ came to pay the penalty for our crimes against God because all of us are Peters.

We have all denied him explicitly by rejecting him. His right for his to rule over our life as our creator or implicitly by going about our daily life as if he doesn't exist or doesn't in fact matter.

[22 : 44] It's an enormous crime, a huge crime against our maker for which he holds us accountable and the penalty is huge. The sentence is death, in fact, eternal death, separation from our creator forever.

And Jesus stepped in for us on Good Friday. He went to the cross for our sin and he cried out from the cross, it's finished.

The job's done. He must have satisfied the penalty to its fullest because on Easter day, he walked out of the tomb free.

Death could not hold him down. In Jesus, God has stamped paid in full right across history so that no one can miss it.

And because Jesus was raised from the dead, God can come to us with a word of mercy and grace and hope. And so, if you allow the challenge to your minds to change your worldview and the word of grace and mercy and forgiveness to fill up your heart, then finally, the resurrection changes the whole course of your life.

[24 : 11] Easter day does not just change our thinking and fill our hearts, it changes the way we live our lives. The whole course of our lives is reorientated by that little word there, go.

The resurrected Jesus, the one who conquered death, sin and evil and is enthroned as ruler of the universe, now directs the course of your life as your creator and as your redeemer.

Live with Jesus as the gracious, merciful, loving master of your life. He sets the agenda. He calls the shots and he calls them to go and tell people about the life and the hope that is available to them in Jesus Christ.

And I think that's why verse 8 of Mark, it's the last verse, it's such a shocking way for Mark, his account of the life and the resurrection of Jesus, it's just such a shocking way to end.

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. They were trembling and bewildered on Saturday as their hopes were dashed with his crucifixion.

[25 : 40] They can't now be trembling and bewildered that death is now being conquered. The resurrection changes everything. It changes the whole course of your life.

The resurrection is the answer to every single human being's deepest longing and that is to live. to live life well forever.

That's why the beauty in the fitness industry booms. It's why you the baby boomers are still wearing jeans because you still want to be in your 20s. We want to be young and vibrant and healthy because those were the days before the emotional pain, the responsibility and the frailty.

We want to live and we want to live well. One of the reasons why it's just so hard for us to suffer in this world is that we think that this physical world is it and when you lose it, you lose the best and the most precious thing.

The resurrection gives us hope beyond that. This is not just it. There is more to come. The resurrection means that everything Jesus promised is true. God is going to perfectly rebuild the world.

[26 : 54] The resurrection changes everything. There is hope for the wheelchair bound, for the person with crippling emotional pain.

No religion in the world except biblical Christianity promises us new and perfect minds, hearts and bodies forever.

Only in Jesus Christ can people find such hope for life now and for life forever. And so when I read of people in an attempt to being helpful and positive, turn the resurrection into a metaphor for new life and growth through suffering, you empty Easter of its hope.

Can you imagine the first responders to the resurrection in the first century going to the poor, to the slaves, to the outcasts, to the diseased in society and saying to them, let me tell you about the resurrection.

Jesus is a great symbol of our good triumphs through evil and so go and be nice to one another. Can you imagine the crippled and the diseased and the poverty stricken, the tormented, the outcasts in their state of despair?

[28 : 35] That's just what I needed to hear. I just needed a positive message like that to help me cope day by day with my crippling pain and loneliness and hunger.

you see, the resurrection as a nice symbol has no power to change anything. It offers us no hope at all.

The message of Easter is not we are all in this together and together we will all get through this. It's not even that Jesus will support us and encourage us to get through this together.

Even if it is a worldwide crisis, the hope of Easter is that Jesus Christ himself is the answer. He is our hope.

He is the one who conquered death. He is risen. He sits as conqueror and Lord and King of Kings of all things. He reigns supreme over life and death and every circumstance.

[29 : 48] He is risen and promises us the same if we trust in him. He calls us to give our lives to him and to experience true joy, true freedom and true hope.

You see, the resurrection makes you free from this life enough to be brave and courageous and sacrificial and patient and joyful no matter what the circumstances.

The resurrection means you can face the worst things in life with hope and with joy. The resurrection means you can give yourself to serving God in this world that he loves and is redeeming and remaking through Jesus Christ.

So friends, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, he would hardly even get a mention in the history books.

The resurrection of Jesus changes everything in life. It's because Jesus is risen and reigning that we have plastered everywhere at this church St.

[31 : 07] Paul's Chatswood that we treasure Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people. He is our greatest treasure. And so wherever you are watching this stream from, whether it be in North America, somewhere around in the suburbs of Chatswood, out in regional New South Wales, in parks or the Central Coast or Singapore, wherever you are, this message is for all people.

Whatever culture you're sitting in, whatever your cultural heritage, whatever your worldview, whatever your belief system, whatever your upbringing, whatever your current circumstances in life, Jesus is risen and he reigns supreme over all.

This is a life-changing message. And if you are not someone who is currently a believer, a truster in the Lord Jesus Christ, can I call you, implore you to come to life in Jesus this Easter.

Let the evidence change your mind, let his word of mercy and grace fill up your heart, and let his call on your life change the priorities of your life.

Happy Easter.