Future Hope

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Date: 27 April 2025

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. My name's Steve. I've not met you before. I've seen you past here at St Paul's, and we have been journeying through the topic of hope! In this Easter season.

And in 1941, December 1941, British Prime Minister was with the American ambassador when he heard for the first time the news that Japan had bombed the American Pacific Fleet while it was in anchor at Pearl Harbor and the devastation as a result of that. And he knew as soon as hearing that news that the United States would be entering World War II and therefore giving Britain and its allies an extra quite formidable ally. And that night, he wrote something in his diary that captures the beautiful, I think, image of what hope is and how it shapes our future. And not just shapes our future, the hope for the future, but also shapes our present existence, our present reality.
He recalls what he wrote in his diary in his six-volume work, The Second World War, about nine years later. He wrote, yes, we have won after all. Yes, after Dunkirk, after the fall of France, after the horrible episode of Iran, after the threat of invasion, when apart from the air and the Navy, we were almost unarmed people. For 17 months of lonely fighting and 19 months of my responsibility in dire stress, we have won the war. How long the war would last or in what fashion it would end, no man could tell, nor did I at this moment care. We should emerge, however mauled or mutilated, safe and victorious.
We should not be wiped out. Our history would not come to an end. Many disasters, immeasurable cost and tribulation lay ahead, but there is no more doubt about the end. Being saturated and satiated with emotion and sensation, I went to bed and slept the sleep of the saved and thankful. What an image of hope.
image of hope. That's what we've been unpacking in this Easter season and the understanding of what Christian hope is. The New Testament word for hope means not wishful thinking, but a rock-solid certainty. And its foundation is the explosive events of the first Easter in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees sin is forgiven, guarantees that everything that Jesus promised in his life and ministry is true and it guarantees it is being delivered, it's granted, eternal life has been granted. It also guarantees that what he said about himself is true. It validates that as he declares that he is God himself. Salvation is certain now and the Christian's future victory over death is a foregone conclusion, even if there are troubled times ahead and we ourselves will spend some time in a coffin. That is the end of all people, but not the end of all. And so to use Churchill's words, the future is so certain in Jesus that the Christian can sleep the sleep of the saved and thankful. That is, in a restless world, the Christian can have deep rest. Hope shapes our present life. I've got three things in terms of points this morning that we're going to journey through as we wind up our series on hope.
[4:27] So the nature of our future hope, that's what Jackie just read out to us. Verse 2, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. The Bible describes here a vision of the end of the world, the climax of history, and it's a picture of what the Christian would call heaven. The vision is not of individual souls raising in spirit form, maybe with some wings, you know, gathering a harp along the way and floating around on white fluffy clouds. That's the Simpsons and that's their theology and many others, but it's not the theology of the Bible. It's not the Christian hope. What we see instead is heaven coming down and transforming the earth.

That is God's kingdom descending with God's king and transforming the universe. The climax of God's plan is a rewoven, healed, perfected material world. A world where even the good things of this world are remade to be infinitely better. Infinitely better. The Bible doesn't give us a picture of heaven where we hover around with wings and in clouds playing hearts, communicating, I'm assuming through some sort of mental, you know, telepathy or something like that. It's a material world, a real world, like this one, where people hug each other, where we walk and we run and we

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laugh and we dance and we kiss and we eat and we work and we play. It's a place like we have never experienced in this world, but it's also familiar as this world is familiar to us. That is, the Swips Alps will still be the Swips Alps, but fundamentally better. I'm not sure how that works, but it will be fundamentally better than what it currently is.
The difference is everything in this world that is broken, even the beautiful things in this world that are broken, all of those things will be made pure and right and whole and good. There will be no Centrelink, there will be no hospitals, there will be no prisons, there will be nothing wrong or bad or evil or right at all. Every one of us has this sense or longing for the perfect and for the complete. It's why we whinge and complain when things don't go well. As good as this world might be at times, it never will ever give us the satisfaction that lasts because every single human being has planted deep inside of them. A longing for the eternal. Deep inside of them. Even the very best marriages will end. The best car will rust. The best holiday becomes a mere photo. It all leaves us longing for something else. It might be a longing for a body or a mind that we've never had or the approval that we've never had or a home that we've never had or a beach or not on today but a beach or a wave that we've never had.
A family we've never had. Whatever it is, these chapters here in the climax of all things says that every one of our desire for fulfillment and satisfaction and contentment is coming.
[8:22] That is the Christian hope. Whatever it is, it's coming. Verse 3 tells us why it will be so right and why all of our hopes and our expectations will be fulfilled. Now the dwelling of God is with people and he will live with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. That's what we were created for. It's what we see right at the very beginning of the Bible.

God and his creation living together in perfect harmony. It's what his plan was all along with his people in the Garden of Eden. Having created all that is and at the end of six days of creating, it says that God rested on the seventh day. And if you look in the creation accounts, the seventh day does not have a morning and evening. The seventh day has no end.
Rest, everything in harmony and peace of God and humanity dwelling together in perfection was the goal of creation of all things. All things in their proper order and in harmony.
That's the goal. And here at the end of all things, we read at the end of the Bible, God is again dwelling with his people. He has always planned and desired to be with his people in a state of perfect harmony. Rest, harmony, flourishing for eternity is the goal.
And when we lost our relationship with God back in Genesis 3, we lost every relationship. Even our relationship with our true selves fell apart in such a way, depending on what's happening in my life, I feel like I'm in a carnival of mirrors. I walk, I'm not sure which one is the true reflection of me. Am I short and stubby? Am I tall and thin? Am I upside down? Am I back the front?
[10:43] I don't know who I truly am. I've lost even my sense of who I am. Adam and Eve immediately began to experience fear and anxiety and their relationship with each other fell apart right at the beginning when they chose to reject their creator. Their relationship with the physical world fell apart.

They began to experience aging and disease and pain and death. And when our relationship with God falls apart, all other relationships fall apart. Restlessness, constant restlessness is the consequence. And when the relationship with God is put right, every other relationship is put right. Everything sad and broken and wrong will be wiped away. That's what's coming. That's the picture of the end of all things. And so heaven, as it's described here, is a place of endless joy and happiness and freedom and fulfillment and beauty and love and contentment. It is a place of rest. Conversely, the future for the inhabitants of Babylon, as it's described here, the picture of those, the kingdom that rejects God, is one of darkness and despair and loneliness.
The future for the members of the new Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, the church is light and joy and intimate relationship. And that's why we see in the second half of chapter 21, in verse 9, one of the angels says to John, come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb, and he carried me away to the spirit, to the mountain great and high, and he showed me the holy city. And he's taken away this moment. John, who writes, he's taken away to see the bride, the wife of the lamb, and what he sees instead is, you know, he's probably imagining he's going to see someone with a big white dress and a violin. Instead, let me show you the bride, let me show you the wife of the lamb, and he takes me and I see a city.

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[12:53] And the details of the rest of the chapter reveal it's a highly unusual city. It's a huge city. And in fact, it's unusual because it's a, it's this massive cube, 2200 kilometers by 2200 kilometers by 2200 kilometers.

And you go, well, what's that all about? Well, it's symbolic. The measurements of the great city, the hope of, of those who trust in Jesus is symbolic. You see, this cube echoes the measurements of the most holy place in Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6. The whole city now is, is what's saying here? The whole city is now the most holy place where God dwells with his people permanently. In the past, only the high priest could, and only once a year, and only under very, very specific preparation rituals. And it's saying here that the blood of Jesus has opened the way now for all to enter and for all to permanently dwell in the presence of God.
And the jewels of the high priest breastplate from the Old Testament, which, which were jewels, which represented the people of God, are now embedded into the, the, the, the walls of the city. The old temple had one entrance. This one has gates on all four sides, welcoming people from all four corners of the world. This, the temple was a symbol of God's presence. And now the symbol has been given away to reality.
[14:56] And John sees something so magnificent, so incomprehensible, that he grabs for language and symbols to try and describe that which is so perfect and so magnificent and so eternal.

This is a city that contains all of God's people. That is what the numbers signify. It's about the size of the world as they knew it at the time.
The thick walls, the angelic watchmen on each gate, the gates which never close, are references to its, its safety, its security, its permanency.
Perfect relationship with God, all people, and the whole created order. And John's grasping for language to try and give us a picture.
How do you describe a world where everything negative, broken, evil, sinful, decaying, dark, destructive, wrong, every single element is taken out.
[16:15] And all that is left is everything good, perfect, whole, light, righteous, loving, kind, and magnified.

And we start to get a glimpse of what forever with God will be like because of the cross. Revelation 21, verses 4 and 5 kind of sum it up perfectly.
He, which referring to God, will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.
He who was seated on the throne says, I am making everything new. It is such a beautiful and intimate image.
Intimate image. God's perfect future for you where he will stoop down and wipe away every tear. Every tear.
[17:20] That's the nature of the Christian hope. The future hope of those who put their trust in Jesus. And so how do we receive that?

How do you get this future hope? And the simple answer is, which is what we just looked at in the last couple of weeks, is believing in both the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and holding onto that as your hope in life.
Jesus' death is alluded to in verse 6 where it says, To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.
So if you weren't here in the last couple of weeks, let me just touch base with you on what's happening here. The John who gets this glimpse of vision here in Revelation is the same John who wrote John's gospel.
And on Good Friday, we looked at John chapter 4 where Jesus meets a woman at a well and says that he can give her water that will mean that she will never thirst again.
[18:31] Jesus in that moment is talking about eternal life and giving her a deep, deep satisfaction in the soul where she's pursued everything else in life to try and meet that hole that's in her life.

And Jesus says, I can give you a water that will flow over into eternal life. And Jesus was offering her in that moment a foretaste of this new heaven and new earth.
And the point that I made on Good Friday is that the deepest longings of our lives, the longing for love, the longing for value, the longing for life never to end, are satisfied in and only in and by Jesus.

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And Jesus offers it entirely to us for free. Not through religious performance, not through moral effort, not through anything. He offers it, as it says, without cost.
Without cost. And how do you get that? I mentioned that at the end of John's gospel, we have Jesus on the cross. And he says several things when he's on the cross.
[19:45] And one thing he says is, I am thirsty. Now, that's just not physical thirst, because he also said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

So on the cross, Jesus is experiencing cosmic thirst that we deserve so that we instead can have the spring of the water of life.
So on the cross, Jesus was experiencing cosmic hopelessness so that we could experience living hope. On the cross, he took the curse of God for our sin so that we can experience an eternal future with blessing.
On the cross, the sun went out at midday and darkness fell so that we could experience an eternal future of light and glory.
And safety. Jesus was nailed to the cross of death so that we can have eternal access to the tree of life. So the foundation of the Christian hope is the work of Jesus in taking our place as a sacrifice for our sin and turning the judgment that we deserve for rejecting our creator away from us.
[21:11] Jesus, God the Son, enters the world he made to rescue rebellious humanity by willingly placing himself under his own judgment on the cross. He diverted God's wrath for our sin onto himself.

So the gospel, the Christian gospel, is the reversal of all things. I think the theologian John Calvin expressed it beautifully. He was sold to buy us back, captive to deliver us, condemned to absolve us, cursed for our blessing, marred that we might be fair, died for our life so that by him fury is made gentle, wrath appleased.
Darkness turned into light, fear reassured, debt cancelled, labour lightened, sadness made merry, misfortune made fortunate, difficulty easy, disorder ordered, division united, rebellion subjected, assaults assailed, vengeance avenged, torment tormented, damnation damned, the abyss sunk into the abyss, hell transfixed, death dead, mortality made immortal.
In short, mercy has swallowed up all misery and goodness, all misfortune. That is the Christian hope. It's all placed on Christ, on the cross, and it's the great reversal.
He gets what we deserve and we get everything that is his. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees that he has accomplished it, all of it.
[22:53] And it confirms that he is God and guarantees the future of all who trust in him. His resurrection is a promise to us that this world is not everything and there is hope beyond it.

His resurrection guarantees our resurrection with him and therefore guarantees our hope. So how do we live for that future hope?
What does it mean to live day by day with such a future hope? For too many, I think, Christians, we view the Christian hope as like an insurance policy.
It's there when you need it, you pull it out. You know, you have an accident in your car, you pull the insurance policy out. As opposed to a registration certificate which attaches my name to the vehicle and it's on the very basis that I use the vehicle day by day.
What does it mean to live day by day? It's common for Christians to believe that the cross alone saves us from our sins and the resurrection is this wonderful, wonderful miracle that proves Jesus was God and that our sins are forgiven.
[24:08] If you like, the resurrection for too many is the happy ending of the gospel. Sort of like after the darkness of the cross, we kind of need to call Hollywood in just to clean it all up for us a little bit, you know, and to finish an ending like a positive happy ending.

But the resurrection of Jesus is fundamentally so much more than that. It is not just for Easter, it is for all of our life. Too many of us, I think, just don't notice statements like Romans 4.25, which declares that Jesus was raised for our justification.
And to be a Christian is to know the power of his resurrection in Philippians 3.10. The resurrection is a source of salvation and life and power to the Christian right now.
It is true that the resurrection of Jesus was a display, a magnificent display of God's power. But it is so much more than the ultimate miracle.
It is not so much a suspension of the natural order of the world, and it is the beginning of the restoration of the natural order of the world.

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[25:30] That's what the resurrection is. The resurrection of Jesus is unique. The resurrection is not just hope for the future that hopefully I will get there in the end.

It is hope for the future. It is the mighty declaration of God that the future kingdom of God that he has promised is now present.
The resurrection is the breaking in of the kingdom. The resurrection of Jesus is not a great spectacle.
It is an invasion in human history. The cross and the resurrection together, and only together, bring the future new creation.
The omnipotent power through which God renews and heals the entire universe comes into our very presence. Right now, the risen Christ sends those who trust in Jesus the Holy Spirit.
[26:40] The Holy Spirit, and both Christ and his Spirit, unites us with Jesus. We have the down payment, the first installment of the future triumph over death, and of our own new, regenerated, remade, renewed physical world.

The great gift of the resurrection is that the future comes into us now, and it frees us from shame, guilt, and fear.
The hope of Revelation 21-22 is not in the present right now for us, who are those who are in Christ fully, but it is substantially.
The Christian can expect a substantial renewal, but not total renewal in all areas of life. If we make the mistake of overstressing the now aspect of the kingdom of God because of the resurrection, we will be overly optimistic and naive about the possibilities of revival and change and transformation. And therefore, we will expect quick fixes to problems, and we will be dismayed with the ongoing suffering and tragedy of our world. If we overstress the not yet aspect of the kingdom, and it's just there in the future, but not so much now, we will be too pessimistic about personal change, too pessimistic about change within the church and change within society.
[28:27] This sort of Christian plays it entirely safe. It's more like the insurance policy. Emotionally disconnects from church, moves churches constantly looking for the thing that's going to satisfy their immediate needs, and withdraws from society in fear of being polluted from society.

The incomparable great power with which God raised Jesus from the dead is now in us, according to Romans 8.23 and Ephesians 1.19 and 20.
And that is why Romans 13, 11 to 13, Galatians 6.15 and 1 Corinthians 6.1 and 2 call us to live every day in light of our future new creation because that new creation has burst into the life of the Christian now.
We participate in the new future renewal of all things in the way we live now. The resurrection of Jesus changes absolutely everything for the Christian because you are part of a new kingdom.
It changes how we conduct our relationships, our attitudes towards wealth and power, what we do with our time, how we work on our vocations, our understanding and practice of sexuality, race relations, social justice.
[29:58] The cross and resurrection give us the shape of the Christian life and how we interact with all of life now. The person who knows that their destiny is guaranteed and it is certain and it is glorious because of the radical love and sacrifice of a forgiving God will be entirely free to live the most radical life of love and service here on earth right now.

It's the hope of eternal rest of safety and love in the end that releases radical sacrificial love in the present and that should cause the Christian to move away from lives of self-centeredness, lives of flimsy loyalties to Jesus, lives of undisciplined devotion, presumption on God's patience into people whose lives are consistently living for something more than self-preservation, self-praise and self-fulfillment.
We are being made into the image of our Saviour who gave himself for all. And so just before Easter, we went through our vision series of seven rhythms of grace.
Spiritual disciplines, if you want to use that language. And if I'd had the four thoughts, a wonderful thing, isn't it? If I'd been able to... I just would have called them rhythms of hope. It would have been another way of putting it.
Each one of our rhythms, those seven rhythms, constantly put the gospel in front of us and constantly put our future hope in front of us.
[31:55] Constantly. As we pursue them, so our hearts are shaped by our future hope. The Christian is not a citizen of this city in the future.

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They are part of it now. And this means that to some degree, to some degree, we can wipe away the tears of our city now through acts of selfless love and mercy and justice.
The Christian hope is a life-transforming, living hope. It's not an abstract idea. We human beings are hope-shaped creatures.
And the Christian hope is a hope that is a gift to us. Not a single one of us deserves it. And it transforms the way we live.
If your hope, for instance, let me just pick up the area of our current day. You might have noticed as you walked in. If your hope is which government sits in parliament in Canberra, it will entirely shape the way you pursue this election.
[33:11] And if you want to see that in practice, come along here Monday to Friday. It'll come here next Saturday. And you'll see it in practice. If that is your hope, if your hope is in your team winning, you'll be devastated when they don't.

Christianity declares that there is no other or greater hope than Jesus Christ. And billions around this world have discovered it in the last 2,000 years.
And the closing verses of Revelation, So first of all, if you're a Christian, pursue life in the city, the eternal city right now, in the way you live.
Pursue it now. Secondly, if you are not someone who has embraced Jesus, let me just take you to Revelation 22 verse 17. It's an invitation to you this day.
On the back of Easter, the spirit and the bride say, come. Come. And let the one who hears, let the one who hears this message today, come.
[34:21] Let the one who is thirsty, come. Let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. And so this Easter, in a age of uncertainty, as confidence in the future declines in our own country, come now to Jesus and find rest for your souls.

Come to Jesus and discover a living hope and live the life of the saved and thankful despite your circumstances.
Amen.

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