

Living Hope

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Nick. I am pastor for discipleship here at this church. It's my joy to be sharing God's word with you on this Easter day. On Friday, we heard the gravity of Jesus last night before his death.

That in the Gethsemane Garden, Jesus glimpsed the cup of God's wrath that he must drink for the sin of all humanity.

But it was not the pain or the shame or the torture of his death that was causing him to sweat blood. It was the abandonment from God, his Father, if he continued to plan their plan to save the world. Jesus showed us that there is nothing worse than being torn apart from God, the Father. And Jesus faced that greatest loss to give us the greatest thing imaginable, to have God.

And on the third day after Jesus' burial on the cross, his followers were trying to come to grips with a similar loss. Because they thought they had found God, but he was dead.

[1 : 18] They'd lost God and they'd lost all their hope. The man on the screen, well, thank you tech team for trying to make things work.

Can you see this strange looking man up here? His name is Pete Holmes. He is a fairly famous comedian. And he has this perspective that he brings into his comedy act about God and people. He thinks it's ridiculous that we as humans could ever think that we might be able to understand who God is. He says that humanity is, together we are like characters in a book.

Characters in a book written by an author, but we can't get to the author. We can't get ourselves out of the book because God, we are in it and God is not in it.

We are stuck in the book. We are like Harry Potter trying to figure out who J.K. Rowling is. Some of the author is reflected in Harry.

[2 : 28] As Pete says, like some of God is reflected in us. But that's as far as we can hope according to this guy. And this is helpful because, not because Pete is right, but because it shows how aware we in our world often are of our hopelessness without God.

Even if we can see that there is an author and a writer and a creator of all of this, he needs to write himself into the story or else we have no way to have him.

If we can't get God, there is no hope. The Bible describes human hopelessness very clearly.

That all humanity is without hope and without God in the world. The world is our place and it seems like this is all we have while we live.

We are hopeless spiritually without God and we are purposeless without meaning and hopeless.

But Christians claim that there is proof that God wrote himself into the book.

[3 : 48] And when he didn't do it just to star in it, he did it to rescue the characters and give himself to us. So, we have Luke 24 before us and we're going to join Jesus' followers as they witness Jesus' unbelievable resurrection.

The disciples were experiencing an acute spiritual hopelessness in this moment. They were anxious. They were asking, what do we do now?

They had no leader. Their Messiah had just died. The disciple John adds in his gospel in chapter 20 that they even locked the door for fear of the Jewish authorities.

Fearing violence against them. They were also disconnected, asking, who are we now? Earlier that day, two of the disciples had left Jerusalem.

Instead of hiding in safety together, maybe that wasn't the safest option, they thought. And so, they left altogether. What if I stay with...

[5 : 01] Why would I stay with Jesus if he's not the Messiah? Incidentally, that was the video we were going to watch. We were going to hear about what happened on the road to Emmaus to those two disciples.

And they were also confused. Do we dare hope that this isn't the end? Because that same two who left earlier that morning had now returned.

They'd knocked on the locked door. They had said they'd seen Jesus. Luke even reports that Peter had seen Jesus too. And they either haven't heard or don't trust the women's report of the tomb being empty that Rachel read out during the singing today.

They were standing in the locked room. Even hearing that angels had testified Jesus was alive. And they were wrestling. Would they give in to hope of these reports?

Or would they give in to their doubt? And then in verse 36, as Janet read, Jesus appeared. And they still do not believe.

[6 : 18] Even when they heard his voice, they saw him. They saw his likeness. Standing in a locked room with them. They didn't lose their confusion or their unbelief.

So how unbelievable is this hope? If you have a Bible in your hands, you hold eyewitness testimony. Gathered by a, what we now call Syrian.

That's where Luke is from. Syrian, Greek-speaking journalist. Soon after these events occurred, he wrote all of this down to share it with you.

And you need to decide whether it is reasonable to hope in something so unbelievable or not. There are four common doubts about Jesus' resurrection that this passage speaks against.

And the first is to doubt the event itself, that the resurrection can't even happen. And for doubt to grow, for this doubt to grow, it's often planted in the assumption that people of this day weren't as educated as us nowadays.

[7 : 32] They were more gullible. They'd just believe anything. But this is upside down. Think about this. In modern day Chatswood, we are far more comfortable than Luke's audience with the idea that death can be held back.

That death can be pushed away. Our life expectancies are more than double what they were back then. We have healthcare and medical miracles and resuscitations and those things that bring you back to life on the walls everywhere, including over there on the other side of church.

It's common. But living under Rome, without hospitals, without modern medicine, death was closer than recovery. You cut your leg, it might be a death sentence.

They were far more experienced with death. And arguably, they would have believed in a resurrection less than we might. But to add to this, no religion at the time in the known world included any expectations or the acceptance of a bodily resurrection.

So, when the leaders of Israel react to Jesus being executed, they convince Pilate to seal Jesus' tomb and place a guard of Roman soldiers outside.

[9 : 01] Not because they were afraid of Jesus coming out. But because they'd heard what Jesus had said about rising again. And they worried that the disciples might break in and pretend that Jesus had risen.

If you want to read about that, it's in Matthew 27. But even though Jesus had promised that he would rise, his disciples themselves had no belief the resurrection was possible.

They made no attempt to fake it. Nobody in their right mind would create a story at the time based on resurrection.

And that brings us to doubt too. The accounts of what happened must be fake. This assumes that the disciples in Luke created a lie, knowing that a Jewish audience would accept a resurrection.

That's the assumption. Surely God's people expected their Messiah to rise. Well, according to modern day scholar N.T. Wright, there was no promise in the Old Testament of a bodily resurrection at all.

[10 : 18] Not one. The only similar resurrection is in Daniel 12 on the screen, verses 2 and 3. But it describes God's people rising together.

Potentially the end of all things. With bodies that shine. Nothing like this mundane, normal body of Jesus that we've just heard about. Jesus' resurrection would have been the least believable lie that the disciples could tell.

Luke is reporting eyewitness testimony that we must, just like them, either believe or make an alternative argument. You could start by trying to argue that, thirdly, the disciples didn't really believe Jesus had risen.

And there's two reasons that doesn't make sense either. Firstly, some who were in that room in Luke 24 died testifying that Jesus was risen from the dead.

Is a lie worth dying for? And they didn't just get killed because of their faith. They faced death with joy.

[11 : 34] Christians were known at the time to be hunted down and brutally killed while singing. They were joyful. They had the confidence that this was not going to be their end.

That they too would be raised because they'd seen Jesus raised. And secondly, they lost the tomb. You can go to Jerusalem nowadays and you can pay money to see a tomb of Jesus. But there's no historical proof that that's the one. And the reason why we don't know where the tomb is is because the disciples lost it.

No one cared. Church leaders ever since had graves that were venerated. People wrote down the date when they died and marked the place where they had been buried.

People traveled long distances to pay respects to their church fathers. But the followers of Jesus completely forgot about Jesus' final resting place because he didn't have one.

[12 : 38] The disciples really believed that Jesus rose from the dead as a real person. And fourthly, they did not just have a spiritual experience.

If you doubt that Jesus physically rose again in this passage, I offer you this. Did you think it was weird that Jesus asked to eat some fish?

Why is this broiled fish story in there? It's so strange. Literature experts say that these kinds of verses in Luke prove that he's trying to convey history.

Not write a myth or a legend. Because it makes no sense. Jesus either stood on the floor, talked, showed them the scars of his execution, and then asked to eat something and ate in front of them, or Luke's a crazy, terrible myth writer.

It's far more likely, in fact, I believe it is true, that Luke is writing down what the disciples and he believe is the truth of what happened.

[14 : 00] That's Luke's testimony. Jesus is no ghost. He's eating. And Luke himself was talking to fellow Gentiles, knowing how outrageous Jewish religion was to the rest of the world already.

So he would never tell something so outrageous and unbelievable as someone being provably killed and executed, and then on the third day rising to life and asking for some dinner?

Unless it happened. You can't argue that there's only a spiritual resurrection. And as Jesus says in the first 39, a ghost has not flesh and bones, as you see I have.

Either the resurrection and all Christianity itself is an illogical lie made up by insane people that no one would expect or believe to be true.

or it's true. Either unbelievable nonsense or unbelievable hope.

[15 : 14] So let's see if Jesus can resurrect your hope in himself. And you might be like the disciples, a little frightened, troubled, confronted even.

Even as doubts rise in your minds, just like the disciples, Jesus wants to prove to you that he is really him. Look at my hands and my feet.

It is I myself. Touch me and see. Jesus really is himself. The friendship of God that the disciples had experienced was back on.

Hope is resurrected in front of them. Jesus' physical body has been restored, not replaced. As he chewed fish and was held down by gravity, just like my hand here, and breathed the stuffy air, it's a bit nicer than it would have been in that locked room hiding from the Jews in that space.

Jesus was recognisable by sight and sound. And he was touchable, flesh and bone like you and I.

[16 : 42] The disciples had their friendship with Jesus resurrected. One of the best parts about living in this city is enjoying food together.

It is one thing that has always been a part of living in this community. I have had the privilege of going around to your houses and you giving me a meal.

And that felt like an extension of I want to be your friend. I want to get to know you. And that is wonderful. But it was so much deeper than that back then. If you ate with someone, it was an invitation into friendship that everyone understood.

And when Jesus ate the fish, know that he didn't have to do that. It doesn't mean he was hungry. It means he wanted to show that he wanted friendship, that we can have him back.

And if you are someone that has a sense that there's a somebody out there who's going to complete you, think of Jerry Maguire or any movie or book or like pretty much every story has this longing in it.

[18 : 04] We're trying to find that person or we can never find that person or we're dealing with the grief of losing that special person. Jesus is that person who can bear the weight of all of our expectations of that special someone.

Even if you have someone in your life right now who comes pretty close and won't be sitting next to you. Death always separates, but Jesus never dies.

And he is saying, you can have me for real, forever. Our relationship with him will continue face to face for eternity.

Jesus is really with us. He's not an imagined presence that we sometimes speak of in grief when someone dies.

They're looking down on us. No, Jesus is really alive and one day will be physically present with you for he will raise you up like him to be with him.

[19 : 15] And he proves the depth of his love for his friends in his scars on his hands and his feet. He says, touch me and see.

And he showed them his hands and his feet. the scars that bear the nail marks of crucifixion on his physical body, he still has them right now.

They're scars that show us that Jesus didn't just die for himself in some kind of self-justifying act before God as a martyr.

No, they prove his suffering achieved something for his followers. He suffered on their behalf. He achieved forgiveness of them.

Steve mentioned this on Friday. Jesus' scars are like our receipt. There I claim that our debt of sin is paid.

[20 : 21] Just like when we leave the store and we're holding on to our receipt. This is our ticket to freedom. We're not going to get tackled by a security guard. We have proved that Jesus has paid our debt of sin.

When we hold Jesus' scarred hands one day, we will hold the receipt that our debt for sin is paid. His scars are hope also for our own scars. if you are suffering through life.

It might be pain, illness, physical, mental, events in the past, trauma in the past, things happening right now.

All of what you face one day, you will see how it matters. you might not be aware of it yet, but one day, if you follow Jesus, you will one day be you in your body restored beyond your tears and your troubles and your story will continue.

[21 : 36] It will not be deleted and you will step out of your suffering, carrying your language and your personhood into the physical embrace of Jesus scarred hands.

Your scars on that day will be shown as worth it following Jesus and his scars are proof to you of that. And you will never have to be apart from Jesus like Jesus was from his father and from his disciples for those three days.

And the proof of this is that Jesus passes through walls. Here's an interesting question that I found in my reading in the last few weeks.

I don't think I'd ever just, it's so simple, but I'd never thought about it. Why was the stone rolled away from the tomb? Why was the stone rolled away from the tomb?

According to this passage, it's not so Jesus could get out. Walls couldn't hold him, he was physically resurrected, and yet he can never be limited by something like a stone or a wall.

[23 : 00] The stone was rolled away, not so Jesus could get out, but so we could see it was empty. Jesus could have knocked on the door of this room with his fearful disciples inside.

After all, he's not a ghost, but he wanted to show his disciples that he could be with them anywhere, in the darkest hour of their life, in the darkest hour of their soul.

There is no limitation for Jesus Christ. He will be with you. Just like Jesus didn't need to eat the fish to show that he was himself, he wanted to.

And unlike Lazarus, who died again, Jesus, the death has lost its grip on Jesus.

Jesus can disappear, as happened before the very eyes of the two on the road to Emmaus, and he can reappear. He lives in a realm beyond decay and limits.

[24 : 13] He isn't like any other religious founder, or any other resurrected person. He will never be held back from his people. We no longer need a temple or a priest to get close to God.

We have Jesus himself. But none of this lands as true for his audience yet.

Even with all this before them, the disciples didn't believe the women, the returning to, even Peter, and now they can't even believe their eyes, even with Jesus in front of them.

And so Jesus needed, needed to open their minds so they could understand. Look at verse 45.

Don't downplay the spiritual experience of believing in Jesus' resurrection.

Luke has given us evidence for it, yet we now still need the same power to open our minds and illuminate these scriptures today as the disciples did in that room, or else we're going to stay just like Jesus' followers in verses 41.

[25 : 30] at best, we can be joyful and amazed, but stuck in unbelief. So Jesus opened their minds to the word of God and the truth in it about himself, gifting them understanding that carried with it belief.

And it's specific belief in Jesus, Jesus, that he is the one who fulfills all that the Old Testament promised, that he rose from the grave on the third day, and that forgiveness of sins comes through repentance in his name.

God today, you do not have to have all the answers, all the understanding, but if you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, and that his scars have the power to offer forgiveness from sins, sins, then you need only turn and repent and believe in him.

You will receive everything in Jesus, eternal life with God and a living hope that puts all the struggles and darkness of this world in a perspective that goes beyond it.

Nothing else can offer you that. Jesus has reasoned with our anxious minds, and he's come near to those who are disconnected, and he's given them belief, and for all those who believe in Jesus, he also destroys our confusion at what is going on in the world, what do we do with our life, and our hopelessness, and graciously gives us purpose.

[27 : 27] Have a look at verse 48. You are witnesses to these things, Jesus says. Witnesses testify.

They testify. Think of it this way. There have been countless people from that moment in that room to now who have testified of the truth of Jesus raised from the dead.

Think of it like a chain. I'm thinking of one of those big industrial chains that's like holding a ship in place on the dock. Huge, big chain.

Each link leads out of that room with these followers. It leads out across history, across hundreds of generations of believers who have each carried the gospel to the world to witness what they've seen.

not in the room on that day, for there were only a few, but what they have seen through the testimony of the Bible.

[28 : 37] And that chain has led all the way into this room. We're still connected. And this happens because Jesus' followers have a purpose, and it's three things.

Spirit, the word, and the plan. First, Jesus promises that we will be clothed with power from on high, verse 49. And this is a reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is God with us wherever we are, not just wherever Jesus stood. Because when he's in that room, that's where God is.

That's how to be close to him. But there is an unbreakable connection with God through the Spirit that every Christian wears like a garment that empowers us to achieve Jesus' purpose.

The confidence the disciples discovered through the Spirit was like having Jesus with them every moment of their life. He is with us in the Spirit.

[29 : 46] And that same Spirit speaks through the Scriptures. It's the Word of God in the Bible. It guides our life and it is our message. And Jesus is specific again.

What words in particular? His summary in verse 44 refers to the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms. And that's a description of how the Jewish Bible, what we now call the Old Testament, was structured.

The law, the prophets and the writings. All of that, that we now call the Old Testament, everything in it points to Jesus. And it's also the words spoken through the apostles and the eyewitnesses to Christ in the New Testament.

It's the activity of the Holy Spirit that inspired the prophets, historians, and the early church who witnessed these things. See, Christians find hope for living in the Bible.

We're like trees, reliant on the sap of Scripture. All of us came to faith through words spoken by the Spirit in the Bible because we were not in the room with Him.

[31 : 03] And as the Spirit empowers us to share the words of Scripture, we are given a plan, a plan to share it with the world. And the plan is clear.

Verse 47 says, It's a plan that we partner with God in while He works the miracle of saving the world along the way.

And Luke himself knew about the Spirit, the Word, and the plan. He knew because people from that room followed Jesus' plan.

The gospel of Jesus had reached Luke where he was, countries away, speaking a different heart language. And he was a Gentile, he was an enemy of the Jews, but he found out that Jesus rose to give him a living hope.

back in chapter 1 of Luke, Luke tells us why he's gone and wrote all this down. It's to bring certainty about what he had heard, to go directly to the eyewitnesses and report back.

[32 : 27] And Luke calls those eyewitnesses, the people he spoke to, or the people who he heard about Jesus from, servants of the word. I think that's a beautiful description of the purpose of Jesus' people, to be servants of the word.

And how thankful we should be to Luke that a servant of the word himself, nearly 2,000 years later, we are hearing from eyewitnesses through his journalism.

And Luke, at the beginning of his gospel, started by reporting what happened in the temple. When Zechariah was the first to hear of the good news of the coming Messiah, and Luke finishes his gospel back at the temple.

Look at verse 51 and on to the end of this book. Jesus ascended into heaven physically, visibly, as if ascending to the throne, the throne of heaven, and then he was gone from their sight.

But this time with Jesus gone, the disciples were joyful, continually, it says. They went to the temple praising God. Their darkness was gone.

[33 : 50] And they went to the temple where they could be as close to God as possible, grateful that their Messiah had risen, and they were waiting for the Spirit to come.

And from that point on, once the Spirit came, they went everywhere. They didn't need to go to the temple anymore. They went from hiding in the darkness, anxious, disconnected, and confused, to believing united and purposeful.

Jesus is a hope for living. It's a living hope. No person need live without hope and without God in the world.

Anxious, disconnected, and confused. No person need fear that we can't know the author who created this story.

So let the resurrection of Jesus confront your mind and your heart and your whole life. There is one who has defeated the darkness of sin and death and rose to life, who now offers the light of life to you.

[34 : 59] So repent today and find forgiveness in him and a living hope. ending