

The Good News of Jesus' Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, this weekend is one of great soberness. When we think about the fact that it was our sin, our brokenness, our rebellion that caused you to send your son to die on the cross in our place.

In our place condemned he stood so that sinners like us could go free. And yet God is also a weekend of unparalleled celebration and joy to know and remember that death did not and does not have the final word.

That the grave has been defeated. That the tomb beside Calvary stands empty. That the stone has been rolled away. And forever and ever we can say with the Apostle Paul, death where is your sting?

Death where is your victory? This morning God we've come to celebrate and remember that our hope and our joy is in you God. And for that we worship you and we adore you.

God we've come to recenter our hearts and our hopes. Our dreams and our desires and to fix our eyes on you. Thank you Jesus that because you are alive, because you conquered the grave, we get to live with hope.

[1 : 07] Not just a shallow superficial hope but a real hope, a living hope. Thank you Lord Jesus that just as you rose from the dead so you promised that we too will experience a new life in you.

And so we do pray and ask for a greater experience of that new life. In this day and this week and the weeks to come. Thank you Jesus for those in our midst who have become Christians in the last few weeks.

And who are experiencing this new life for the first time. God we join with all of heaven in celebrating your power to give new life to those who are spiritually dead. And we thank you Lord that your resurrection means that while we toil and strive.

While things don't always go our way. While we may not even see the fruit from our efforts to honor and glorify you. You promise us that there will be fruit. You promise that our labor and our faithfulness will not be in vain.

Jesus we long to see more of your resurrection life and power in our midst. In our hearts and in our church and in our city. We long to see the gospel take deeper root in our hearts.

[2 : 11] And for the Holy Spirit to open our eyes. To see you and to know you. We long God for sin to be gone. For idols to lose their grip on us. For Satan's lies to be exposed in our hearts.

And for that we need your Holy Spirit. Oh Holy Spirit come and apply the gospel to our hearts. Come and help us to see you and to know you and to trust you we pray. Come Holy Spirit come. In your wonderful name. Amen. Amen. Let's listen to the reading of God's word. And then I'll be back. Thanks for the reading.

This came from Matthew 27 and 28. The next day that is after the day of preparation. The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said.

Sir we remember how the imposter said when he was still alive. After three days I will rise.

Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day.

[3 : 13] Lest disciples go and steal him away and tell the people. He has risen from the dead. And the last fraud would be worse than the first. Pilate said to them.

You have a guard of soldiers. Go make it as secure as you can. So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Now after the Sabbath toward the dawn of the first day of the week. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold there was a great earthquake.

For an angel of the Lord descended from heaven. And came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning. In his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards

trembled and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women. Do not be afraid. For I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. For he has risen.

[4 : 12] And he said come see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead. And behold he is going before you to Galilee.

There you will see him. See I have told you. So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy.

And ran to tell his disciples. And behold Jesus met them and said. Greetings. And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him.

Then Jesus said to them. Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. And there they will see me.

While they were going. Behold. Some of the guard went into the city. And told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel.

[5 : 12] They gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said. Tell people. His disciples came by night. And stole him away while we were asleep.

And if this comes to the governor's ear. We will satisfy him. And keep you out of trouble. So they took the money. And did as they were directed.

And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee.

To the mountain to which Jesus has directed them. And when they saw him. They worshipped him. But some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[6 : 12] Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold. I am with you always to the end of the age. This is God's word.

Great. Thank you Gary and Kathy. For two thousand years. Christians across the ages. Across every culture. Every ethnicity.

In every corner of the globe. From every Christian tradition and heritage. Have celebrated the wonder of Easter weekend. This incredible and unexpected end to Jesus' time on earth.

That though Jesus was clearly crucified to a Roman cross. His body was clearly laid in the tomb. Unexpectedly. On the third day he rose again.

And the tomb was found to be empty. And he appeared to more than 500 people. In the coming weeks after his crucifixion. On Calvary. And ever since that day.

[7 : 12] Christians of every stripe and color. Have celebrated this weekend. As on one hand. One of the most horrific. Weekends. In the calendar of the year. But at the same time.

One of the most glorious. And exciting. And wonderful weekends. In the Christian year. When Christ laid down his life. Only for him to take it up again. On the third day. And so.

Augustine said this a couple of hundred years ago. He said. We are the Easter people. And hallelujah is our song. In other words. What he's saying is that. This weekend.

Is so central to everything. That the Christian faith. Is all about. Now. You may be here this morning. And maybe you still got questions. About Christianity.

And the faith. And Jesus. And the claims of the Bible. And you may wonder. Why it is. That this brutal. And yet astonishing. Claim of the Bible.

[8 : 07] That Jesus died. But he no longer stayed. Died. He came alive. Why is this so central. To the Christian faith. In other words. You may say. Look. I see the point in religion.

Religion helps people. Be a better person. To contribute towards society. And Christians. Why don't you just. Emphasize Jesus moral teachings. Or his good example. Why do you need to make such a big deal.

Of the resurrection. Can't you just. Teach us to all behave. And be moral like Jesus. Why is such a big deal. About the death. And resurrection. Resurrection. Well this morning.

I'm not going to give us. A whole lot of proofs. For the Bible's claims. Or the historical credibility. For Jesus resurrection. Though we could do that easily. If you want to read up about that.

There's more than enough evidence online. And I encourage you to. To go and read up about that. And I think Professor N.T. Wright. From the University of St. Andrews. Is probably the academic.

That's covered the subject.

[9 : 02] Most extensively. But I really do want to encourage. All of us. To go and examine the evidence. Why is it that Christians believe. That Jesus really did die. And really did rise again.

In bodily form. It wasn't just an hallucination. Or a psychotic experience. Why is it. That Christians believe this. And I want to encourage you. To go and examine the evidence.

And I think you'll find. That there's more than sufficient evidence. To believe. What the Bible claims. That though Jesus died. And was laid in the tomb. He really did rise again. But this morning. What I want to rather try and do. Is to show us. Both those of us. That consider ourselves. Followers of Jesus. As well as those of us. That are maybe. Still exploring the claims of Christ. What relevance.

This has to our lives today. Why it is. That the empty grave. Is so central. To everything. That the Christian faith. Is all about. And why this should. Give us great cause. To celebrate.

[9 : 56] And to rejoice. Why is Easter Sunday. Such a big deal. Yes. It means that Jesus. Is remarkable. Yes. It means that Jesus. Probably is who he said he is. But if you already believe that.

If you already believe that he died. For your sins. What relevance does this have. This afternoon.

This week. This month. In the everyday trenches of life. Well I'm so glad you asked that question.

And so let's answer it together. Now. What I. What I want us to do. Is to look at three very brief. New Testament passages. It's actually not the passage we read. The passages are in your bulletin.

And so. Feel free to take a look there. And we're going to look at three reasons. Or three things that the resurrection. How it speaks hope into our lives today. And the first reason is this.

Jesus' death and resurrection. Speaks about a living hope. A living hope. One of the things that us Hong Kongers. Frequently hear people saying.

[10 : 54] Is that you've got to have a hope. You have to have a hope. To get through the difficulties in life. Just last week. I was talking to a new friend of mine. Who's a barista at a coffee shop. And we were talking about faith.

And the Bible. And Jesus. And I said. What do you believe? And he said. I believe in myself.

Friends. What do you believe? Where is your source of hope? In the New Testament.

The Apostle Peter writes this letter. To a bunch of Christians. And these Christians are experiencing. Unbelievable persecution. And oppression. As a church. We looked at this last year. They're being persecuted.

And oppressed by civil leaders. They're being persecuted. And oppressed by society. And worst of all. Many of them. Are being persecuted. By their own families. And Peter writes to them.

And look at what he says. In chapter one. He says. Blessed be the God. And the Father. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy. He has caused us. To be born again. Born again.

[11 : 49] To a living hope. Through the resurrection. Of Christ. From the dead. Into an inheritance. That is imperishable. undefiled. Unfading.

Kept or guarded. In heaven. For you. And so Peter writes. That for the Christians. This radical persecution. And oppression. Doesn't mean that life is now miserable.

And we've just got to. Grin and bear it. And try and get through this life. To the other side. Peter

says that for the Christian. Even in the midst of the difficulties of life. Even in the midst of trials.

And things that we face. For the Christian. We get to live. With what he calls. A living hope. In the

midst of life's difficulties. It's a hope. Which doesn't depend. On the circumstances of your life.

It doesn't go up and down. With who likes you. Or who doesn't like you. It's not a hope. That is dependent. On your financial status. Your marital status. Your status in society.

[12 : 45] What people think of you. It's a hope. Which is anchored. In a historical event. But an event that carries with it. Unbelievable promise. For the future. You see.

Christ's resurrection. From the dead. Wasn't God's plan B. To make the best. Out of a bad situation. You know. It wasn't like. Jesus is being carried off.

To Calvary. And God says. Oh boy. That's not how we plan things to go. Let's come up with a contingency plan. Okay. We'll rise him from the dead. And so that at least things work out.

All right. No. No. No. No. From before the world began. It was always God's plan. That God himself. Jesus Christ. Would come to earth. Die on the cross. Take the sins of the world.

Upon himself. But he wouldn't stay dead. He would rise again. Victoriously. It's what the Old Testament spoke about. It's what the prophets in the Old Testament promised. It's what Jesus promised.

[13 : 41] And it's what happened. Jesus' death and resurrection. Was always God's plan. To deal with the sin of the world. And friends. You see the Christian hope is an unshakable confidence.

That God will do what he said he'll do. And if you need one bit of proof. One bit of evidence. How can we take God at his word? Why should we trust him?

Look to the empty grave. Look to the tomb that was once filled. But is now empty. God who spoke for thousands of years. His promises that one day his son would come and die.

But would be raised from the dead. He did it. And you can bank your life on him. You see friends. At the very essence. Christianity is not a philosophy.

It's not a world view. Though it will give you a world view. It's not just an approach to life. Though it will shape your approach to life. At its very essence. Christianity is a person.

[14 : 37] It's the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the person who made you for himself. And to know him. It's the person of Christ who loves you unconditionally. And went to the cross for you.

But at the essence of Christianity. It's the person of Jesus who died and didn't stay dead. And he rose again from the grave. And because Jesus really did rise from the grave. Because the grave really is empty.

Because Jesus really did show himself to more than 500 people in the coming weeks. Because Jesus really did go to those that have doubts. And he convinced them.

He showed them that it is who he said he is. Christians get to live with this living hope. Because Christ who is the ground and the essence and the foundation of our faith. Lives and lives forever more.

Karen Jobes is a theological expert and theologian. And she writes this. She says. The present reality of the Christian's life. Okay.

[15 : 34] So that's your life today. Tomorrow. This week. The present reality of the Christian's life. Is defined and determined by the reality of the past. The resurrection of Jesus.

But it's also guaranteed into the future. Because Christ died and lives forever more. And just think about how this affects your everyday realities of life.

And one of the biggest challenges for us who live in Hong Kong is property. Right? Property prices. How many young people here feel like I'll never be able to afford a property.

And there's this real sense of hopelessness. And we consider the price of rent and the price of buying property. It's such an area of concern for Hong Kongers. Well, do you know in the first century when Peter writes to these Christians.

In their day and age. Property and land was too a source of great financial security. A source of your inheritance. And your wealth and your security was tied up to the land.

[16 : 32] But as these followers of Jesus put their faith in Jesus. What happens? The government starts persecuting them. Society persecutes them. And many of them need to flee the land which they've grown up on.

Many of them have to leave the towns and cities in which they've lived all their life. And what's worse is when their families turn on them. Their very inheritance. Their financial security in the future. Is now jeopardized.

But look at what Peter writes. He says, In the gospel, because Jesus died and because Jesus rose again. You are given an inheritance. Which cannot be taken away by any opposition or any government.

You are guaranteed inheritance. Which cannot be destroyed by all the evil or the wickedness in the world. You are given an inheritance. Which doesn't fade or diminish with time. You are given an inheritance which is rock solid.

Because it's rooted in the historical fact. That Jesus Christ is God. That he loved us enough to die for us. But he didn't stay dead. And that is the reason for our hope.

[17 : 33] Friends, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's caused us to be born again to a living hope. Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Into an inheritance that cannot perish.

Cannot spoil. Cannot fade. Cannot fail. But that's not all the Bible promises. The Bible promises that because Jesus died and rose again. There is a new life for those who come to trust him.

In the New Testament, the book of Romans is one of the most magnificent books in the entire Bible. It's kind of a high point in the gospel story. And the reason is because the book of Romans so clearly differentiates between Christianity and religion.

Between the hopelessness of humanity apart from Christ and the hope of humanity in Christ. But then there's this accusation. Some people say, well if Jesus died on the cross to die for our sins. If this radical promise of forgiveness is given to us. Why do we stop sinning? Why don't we just continue to live as we please? I mean Jesus has promised forgiveness. He's purchased forgiveness.

[18 : 38] Shouldn't we just carry on living as we please? And listen to how Paul answers that accusation. Listen carefully. He says this in chapter 6 verse 3. He says, don't you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into his death?

Now he's not here only talking about water baptism. He's talking about when you're put into Christ. When you become a follower of Jesus, you are immersed in Christ. And he says, don't you know that when that happened, something inside of you died with Jesus.

Don't you know that those of us who have been put into Christ have been put into his death? We were buried with him into death in order that just as Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Now that might sound like quite a mouthful. Let's see if we can try and make sense of it. Paul's saying this. He says, if you are a follower of Jesus, when you become a follower of Jesus, something deep inside of you, something intrinsic to who you are, dies.

The part of you that wants to live for yourself, the part of you that lives to answer the question, what's in it for me? How can I make myself successful? That self-orientated person, a part of that dies and is buried with Christ.

[19 : 54] Christ. And God gives you a new kind of self, a new heart, a new control center in your life. And that new self he calls the newness of life. Look at what he says.

He says, we were buried with Christ into his death in order that we might walk in newness of life. But to what can we attribute this newness of life? Is it that you kind of, you know, turn 30 years old and you think, okay, I've partied long and hard enough.

It's time to get responsible. It's time to get my act together. Is it that you feel like through meditation and self-improvement, I'm going to make myself a better person? To what can you attribute this new life that God gives you?

Well, look what he says. And what is this newness of life?

What does this actually mean? What does this look like this week as you go to work and as you go on dates and you look for work and you make money? What does this actually mean? Well, it means a couple of things. It means you have a new hope.

[21 : 00] We already spoke about that. It means that you have a hope that is not based on circumstances but based on the truth of who God is. It means that you are given a new identity. Your identity is not found in what people think about you or what society says about you or what your colleague or your boss says about you.

You have an identity that is based on truth, not in opinions. You have an identity that is based on grace, not on performance. You have a new identity that is based on love, not just on how you feel about yourself.

You have this new identity which is given, which is rooted in God's unchanging love rather than your ever-changing feelings. God gives you a new identity.

He gives you a new purpose to live for the glory of God and for the well-being of others. Rather than just looking for how can I get ahead in life? How can I be successful in life? How can I make a name for myself?

In Christ, God gives you a new purpose. He gives you a new reason for living, a new reason for your being. How can I love and honor the one who made me for himself and will never turn away from me?

[22 : 02] How can I love and serve those in my city? And friends, though your name may never be written in life, in lights, though your name may never be found in the newspaper, maybe you won't make as much money as you would another way.

You'll be found in Christ. You'll have a purpose. You'll have an identity. You'll have a reason for living. You'll have a purpose which at the end of your life will not have been a waste because Christ gives you this newness of life.

But then also he gives you a new power to defeat sin because this new life is yours. It's not just a revamp of the old life. Jesus doesn't just give you extra strength to try and be a better person.

He puts his spirit inside of you. He causes you to be a new person. I remember a few years ago hearing a testimony of a guy in the UK, and he was considered to be Britain's most dangerous criminal.

Okay? Young man in his 30s, mid-30s, Britain's most dangerous criminal. And essentially he was brought up by his uncle. His uncle was also a violent criminal.

[23 : 09] And his uncle taught him from a young age how to be respected. And the way to be respected was just to beat up anybody that gave you a funny look or didn't treat you the way that you wanted to be treated.

And so this man and his uncle would go around robbing houses, stealing cars, beating up people that got in their way, and just living a life of thuggery. Anyway, eventually it caught up with him.

And so this man goes to jail. And he spends a number of years in various maximum security prisons, going from one prison to the next to the next in solitary confinement.

Anyway, after a couple of years, relatively good behavior, and he hears that there's an alpha course in the prison. An alpha course is a course that helps people discover the wonder of Jesus.

And so he hears there's this alpha course, and so he convinces the gods to let him go on the alpha course. He's not really interested in the course, but he hears that they give you free food there. And so he decides to go for the free food.

[24 : 09] And the first couple of times, he's not all that interested. He's just sitting on the side, munching his cookies. But after a while, he starts to listen in. And he starts to wonder whether the stuff about Jesus is really true.

And eventually a question comes into his mind is, if Jesus is real, and if Jesus is who he said he is, I wonder if he can change my life around. And a couple of weeks later, he says he goes to his prison cell one night after an alpha course.

And he gets on his knees, and this is what he says. He says, God, I don't even know if I believe in you, but I hate the man that I've become. If you are real, you need to come and change me.

Friends, isn't that an incredible statement? God, I hate the man that I've become. I need you to come and change me. I need you to come and make me new. And he says, in that moment, it's like the whole of heaven, the love of heaven got flooded into his prison cell.

He was overwhelmed with emotion, and he starts crying out. And he says, that day his life turned around. He became a different person. He changed the orientation of his heart. Suddenly, the things that he loved to do, he now hated doing.

[25 : 19] The things he previously hated doing, showing respect to people, being kind to people, he now loved to do. Something inside of his life turned around, and he became a whole new person. Why?

Because Paul promises us that because Jesus died and he rose from the dead, there is a newness of life. There is a new person that he promises, and he can turn your life around. Friends, maybe that's you.

Maybe you feel like, I've put on a brave face, and I say face in front of people, but actually inside of me, I hate who I've become. Friends, there's new life for you.

There's new life, and the promise is this, that the grave is empty. It's done. He rose from the grave.

He's alive, and he can promise you new life as well. Friends, there is a new life awaiting for you.

And if you're not a Christian this morning, this promise of new life is freely available. You don't need to earn it. You don't need to buy it. You don't need to perform for it. You don't need to pay any money for it.

[26 : 17] It is absolutely free. All you need to do is come to Jesus and surrender and ask him to be Lord of your life. But all this is given because the grave is empty.

Thirdly and finally, last point is this, our labor is not in vain. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul gives his greatest defense for an argument, or defense of an argument for the resurrection from the dead. And he goes through this whole long argument. And at the end, he says this. He says, death, where is your sting? Death, where is your victory? In other words, he's mocking death.

He says, you gave your best attempts at Jesus. And look how that turned out. He rose from the grave. And then after this long chapter on the resurrection, Paul writes this. And this is incredible.

Listen up. He says, therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast. Abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

[27 : 19] And isn't that an incredible statement? That if you are in Christ, your faithfulness and your labor and the things that you give yourself to are not in vain. Friends, Paul is saying here that because Jesus died and he didn't stay dead, the way you spend your life, if you live for the glory of God and for the good of others, that may not make you a lot of money.

It may not earn you the applause and the accolades of society. You may not get the best paying job in society. And you may not stay in the biggest apartment that you could stay in otherwise.

But your labors, your efforts, your faithfulness to serve Jesus, even if they attract the ridicule and the scoffing and the mocking of others, none of it is in vain. Because every bit of it will reap a harvest in eternity.

Think about it this way. Those of you that are in finance. Imagine one day you're at home and Jesus Christ himself comes to you and he says, I've got some information for you.

You know this stock that is very cheap and considered worthless. I want you to buy that stock because at the end of your life you'll be a billionaire. Okay?

[28 : 29] I don't think Jesus would say that, but just imagine hypothetically. He came to you and he said, this stock, I know it looks worthless. I know it's cheap. I know everyone's going to ridicule you and scoff you.

Buy the stock. You'll be a billionaire. What would you do? Well, friends, in a way, that's what Peter's saying here. Or that's what Paul's saying. He's saying for those of us who are in Christ, when we invest our lives in the purposes of God, when we invest our lives for the glory of God and for the good of others, this stock may not look very impressive.

Others may mock you and laugh at you and ridicule you. You may not make a whole lot of money for it, but it won't be in vain because the return on investment will be more than a billion fold in this life and in the life to come.

And, friends, sometimes you may wonder, what's the point? Sometimes you may feel like I've sown and I've sown and I've sown. I've tried and I've tried and I've tried. I've been faithful to God and where's the fruit?

What's the point? Has it amounted to anything? Some of us have been witnessing to friends and family. Some of us maybe have passed over work opportunities. Some of us maybe have walked away from a relationship because you knew that that wasn't honoring God.

[29 : 41] And now you may ask him, what's the point? Was it all a waste? Look at what Paul says. He says, know this, that in the Lord, your faithfulness is not in vain.

But why? Because Jesus died and he didn't stay dead. Because he rose from the grave. Because the tomb is empty. And because he promises that what happened to him is going to happen to those who trust him and follow him.

Because he is the first fruits, the example of what's going to happen to everyone who trusts and follow him. Friends, for those of you who are looking into the claims of Christ, one of the things that Jesus says is this.

You got to know, he doesn't only take half of you. He'll take all of you or he'll take none of you.

Jesus says if you want to follow him, you have to come and surrender all. You have to surrender everything.

Jesus says you have to turn your back completely on the false gods which promise so much but only enslave you. You have to come and surrender everything. You have to embrace the cost of following him.

[30 : 40] And that may mean that the world will turn its back on you. That may mean persecution. That may mean that your family doesn't understand. But look at the promise. For those who are in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

Because Jesus has died and he's risen again. And he promises that his resurrection will be your resurrection too. And friends, what this means for us is that Easter Sunday is a day of great celebration and hope.

It's a day of remarkable joy and confidence. It's a day of living hope, of newness of life, knowing that nothing we do for the glory of God is ever in vain. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song.

Will you stand with me and let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, Heavenly Father, Holy Spirit, we've come to worship and adore you.

We've come, God, to be reminded that our hope in this world is not found in our circumstances. It's not found in our bank accounts. It's not found in who likes us or doesn't like us.

[31 : 46] Our hope in this world is found in you, God. And it's found in the historical event that you died and you rose again. And you promised to return and you promised to bring all those who are in you with you to glory.

God, I pray that for those of us that are followers of Jesus, I pray this week, God, won't you remind us of the wonder of the cross. This week, God, I pray that we won't just move on from Easter, but that, God, we will continue to celebrate and find our hope in that.

God, for those of us that feel tired, feel exhausted, feel worn out, feel weary, feel like we've sown and we've sown, we've tried and we've tried.

God, for those of us who feel like our faithfulness to you has cost us so much and we wonder if it's worth it. Jesus, this morning, won't you send your Holy Spirit to refresh us and to revive us?

Won't you cause that newness of life to flood our hearts? God, this morning, won't you open our eyes to see that whatever we do in you and for you and with you is not in vain.

[32 : 50] God, this morning, come and wash us, flood us, give us great reason and cause to celebrate and rejoice. Come and draw near, we pray. In your wonderful name, amen.