

Easter: The Promise of Hope

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 April 2021

Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[0 : 01] The scripture reading comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 15. The text is a bridge, so it be all along on the screen or any other bulletin. Starting in verse 1, we read, Now I will remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you prophesy the word I preached to you, and then you begin to gain. For I deliver to you at the first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to see first, then to the twelve, then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have gone with me.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are all of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Why are we in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus, our Lord. I die every day. What do I gain of, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?

If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.

[3 : 30] For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. But someone will ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? So is it with the resurrection of the dead.

What is sown is perishable. What is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body.

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

[4 : 53] But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. This is the word of God.

Great. Thanks, Annabelle. That was a long reading, but thank you. Good morning, everybody. And it is so good to be back with the Watermark family, to see your faces. Some of you, we haven't seen your faces in months, and so a warm welcome to you. If you are new or watching online, my name is Kevin, one of the elder pastors here. It is so great to be with the church family once again. We've missed you so much, and this just feels like, I think we said it last time, like a good family reunion meal together, right? And so a warm welcome. I would love you to join me as we pray together. And I'm going to read a prayer that was written by a man called Scott Smith.

It's not too long. Will you join me as we pray and just revel in Christ this morning? Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, the question you put to the Pharisees before your arrest, who do you say I am, remains the most important question for us to answer, even here today in 21st century Hong Kong.

Lord Jesus, the more we study the scriptures, the more we realize there is always more to you. You, Lord Jesus, are the creator, the sustainer, the restorer of all things, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, and everything in between. Angels worship you. Tiny birds depend upon you.

Jesus, you are the second Adam, not just our second chance. You are the son of David, but you're also the son of God. You lived a life of perfect obedience for us. You, Jesus, exhausted all judgment against us on the cross. By you, we are completely forgiven. Jesus, in you, we are perfectly righteous.

[7 : 07] Jesus, you are our reigning king, our returning bridegroom, our sovereign over days, over all dominions, even sovereign over flowers of the field. Bruised reeds love your appearing. Children dance at you. Demons tremble before you. Jesus, you are gentle and lowly. You are high and exalted.

Wonder of wonders, because you are this and so much more. We are in your heart. We are on your mind all the time. This doesn't make us special. It makes us yours. Jesus, you know us perfectly, and for some reason you delight in us fully. Jesus, there's not a moment you're not loving us, praying for us, advocating for us. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Continue to free us from under-thinking about you, under-believing in who you are. So very amen, we pray, in your glorious and graceful name.

Amen. Amen. Well, this morning, as we have heard and sung about, is Resurrection Sunday. And along with billions of Christians around the world, we celebrate the fact, this astounding and unexpected event in the history of the world. That 2,000 years ago, on Passover weekend, in the city of Jerusalem, Jesus of Nazareth was condemned to die as a criminal. And a Pontius Pilate, he was nailed to a Roman cross. He was marched up to Calvary, hoisted up on the cross. And there, he was left to hang and to die for the sins of the world. That the sins of all those who come to him in faith and repentance, who trust in him, will be put on his shoulders. There, Jesus took the wrath of God so that those who come to him in faith no longer bear that wrath, but are under his gracious forgiveness.

And so we celebrate that. But this morning, we celebrate that on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. That the disciples found his tomb. The stone that was rolled to seal the tomb was rolled away.

That the tomb was empty. The grave clothes had been folded up. And then the coming hours and days, Jesus revealed himself in a physical, bodily, resurrected, nail-scarred body to his disciples.

[9 : 33] Jesus rose not just as a spirit. Jesus rose not just as a ghost. Jesus rose in a physical, nail-scarred body. And his disciples and many others were going to testify how they had encountered him.

I know for some of us that are maybe still trying to make sense of this, it seems crazy that Jesus, who was dead, could rise again. Central to the Christian message, central to the whole Christian understanding of what life in God's kingdom is, is this idea that Jesus, who was laid in the tomb, rose again. And as we said, not just in a spiritual sense, not just that Jesus rises from our hearts when we believe in him. Jesus' death and resurrection is not just a myth to lay credence to this newfound religion. Jesus, the historical event, really happened that he died and he rose again. But what does that mean for us today? What does that mean for us in 21st century Hong Kong, that this crazy event that happened 2,000 years ago? Well, on one hand, it means that the claims that Jesus made about himself are verified. Jesus really is who he said he was, the divine son of God who came to take upon himself the sins of the world. But as we're going to look at today in the passage that Annabelle read to us, it means so much more than something that happened 2,000 years ago and something that's going to happen one day in the future. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead changes the entire way that those that are in Christ view life and understand what life in our world looks like and means. And so let's look at 1 Corinthians 15 as we work through this passage today.

And so if you've got your bulletin, open it up with me. We're going to work through it a little bit and this passage. Now, we need to understand the context of what's going on here.

Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians. And obviously, the city of Corinth is a city in ancient Greece. And if you'll know anything about Greek philosophy, the Greeks believed that the material physical body is kind of something of less value than the spiritual and immaterial world. For the ancient Greeks, the spiritual world, the immaterial world was good and righteous and look forward to that. The physical world was of lesser value, even something that is wrong, something that is evil. Now, interestingly enough, the Corinthians believed that Jesus really did die and rise again. They had looked at the evidence, they had heard the testimony, they had done the research, and they fully believed that Jesus died and rose from the grave. But what they weren't so sure about is that when human beings die, there is a physical after, there is a physical world to come, which we will inhabit. For the Corinthians, when we die, our bodies just, all the physical world gets done away with. And we somehow transcend into an immaterial, soulish, disembodied state, and we do something up in the heavens. Who knows what, but some immaterial world up there that our spirits go to.

And Paul writes them to say that this misunderstanding of the world to come actually is going to impact the way that we live our lives here and now. And so for them, Jesus' resurrection from the dead was some unique event that happened to Jesus alone because on the basis of his being the Son of God. But for everyone else, the best that we can hope for when we die is some immaterial, soul, kind of disembodied state where we go in the clouds and maybe play harps and sing kumbaya, my Lord, for all eternity.

[13 : 28] And Paul's going to show them that that's not the case. And what we believe about what Jesus did on the cross and what his resurrection means actually changes everything about our lives.

And so the first thing, or let me say this, I think in our day and age, many Christians believe something similar. We know that Jesus died. We know that Jesus rose again. And we hope that that, what that means is that somehow after our life, it'll mean that there's hope for us. But what that means, we don't really know. Maybe it just means that our souls get to be in heaven. And we, as we said, we sit on clouds and we sing songs, but it all sounds a little ethereal, a little domesticated, a little boring, if we are allowed to say. What Paul writes to show us here is that Jesus' resurrection from the dead in a physical bodily sense means that for those of us that are in Christ, our resurrection from the dead in a physical bodily sense, in a physical glorious world, a majestic world is absolutely certain. Look at what he says here in verse 12. He says, now if Christ is proclaimed as being raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there's no resurrection from the dead for us? So the Corinthians are saying, it's fine that Jesus rose from the dead, but us, this is all there is in life. Let's just make merry and make the most of this world.

Let's just live it up, make the most money, satisfy our lives here, because after this world, who knows what there is to come? Maybe our souls will go into some next world existence, but this world is where it all really comes. And Paul is saying, if Jesus really rose from the dead, how can you say that all we have to hope and live for is the things of this world?

Don't you know there's a whole nother world that's coming? He says, verse 13, for if there's no bodily physical resurrection of the dead for us, then not even Christ has been raised.

And then our faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. They've died. They're non-existent. For if, as Christians, we hope in this life only, we of all people are most to be pitied. Friends, you see that? If our hope is found in the things of this world only, well, we of all people are most to be pitied. There's no difference.

[16:00] What's the point of being a Christian? Then Christianity is all a self-improvement project. But, he says, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead and is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, those who have died. Now, the word first fruits is taken from an agricultural, a farming analogy, and it means the down payment, the guarantee of what's to come. Let's say you reap a harvest, and the first fruits indicates what the rest is to come, what it looks like. You go to the market and you want to buy some fruit, and the seller says, yeah, have a taste. He gives you a first fruit, a taste of what the rest of the batch will be like. It's an indication of what is to come.

If you're to make a payment, you pay a deposit, the first payment, guaranteeing the rest to follow. Jesus' physical bodily resurrection from the dead is not just a metaphysical analogy.

It's actually a guarantee of what is to come in the world to come, what will happen to us, that our bodies will rise in a physical resurrection glorious sense.

For those who are with Christ, our resurrection is guaranteed by the living God. The resurrection, for those of us that are in Christ, is absolutely guaranteed.

It's certain. It's to come. Friends, this world, in this world you will have trouble. But this world is not where your hope lies. There is a world to come which is absolutely certain.

[17:37] But look at what Paul says. Secondly, he says, not only does Jesus' physical bodily resurrection make our own resurrection absolutely certain, it makes it wonderful.

Look at how Paul describes it in verse 35. He says, someone will say, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they have? Okay, so Paul is telling us here, when you die, you and I will be raised from the dead, not in this world, in the age to come, with a physical, glorious, wonderful, resurrected body.

In a physical, wonderful, glorious world. But what kind of bodies will we have? My grandmother just passed away last week. She was 98 years old.

What kind of body? She became a follower of Jesus in her mid-70s. And what kind of body will she be raised with in Christ? Well, look at what Paul says here.

Paul answers with the analogy of a seed. He says, when you plant a seed, the seed is just a bare kernel of what you hope will grow. You plant an acorn, you hope to get an oak tree.

[18 : 50] You plant an avocado stone or pip, you hope to get an avocado tree. You plant a tiny chili seed, and you hope to get a chili bush. Paul says, in the same way, our bodies are like in kernel form.

And when they die, what is raised is not just a slightly improved version, but a whole new, glorious version. Look at what he says here in verse 42.

Friends, how many of us are getting aged?

How many of us here struggle with sickness and disease? Some of us, some of us with diabetes. Some of us are gluten intolerant. Some of us daily face the battle of pain and aches and agony.

Friends, our body is going to be sown in weakness and fragility. Perishable. It's going to be raised a whole new, glorious body.

[20 : 17] Pain-free. Ache-free. Disease-free. No more agony. No more pain. No more needing to watch what you eat. No more reaction and pain in our bodies to come.

In fact, look at what he says in verse 49. He says, just as we have borne the image of the man of dust in this world, so we shall bear the image of the man of heaven. Paul is saying that in the world to come, our physical bodies will resemble Jesus' resurrection body.

Isn't that incredible? He says the same thing in Philippians chapter 3. He says, when Jesus comes, he will transform our lowly, sin-ravaged, pain-infected bodies with his glorious body.

Our physical bodies in the new heavens and the new earth will, in the glorious age to come, will resemble in some way the glorious, majestic body of Jesus. Isn't that incredible?

Isn't that good news? Friends, heaven is not just going to be us sitting on the clouds, playing harps, wondering what to do with our time. Heaven is going to be a glorious and a renewed creation where we will join with Christ in enjoying God, enjoying creation, enjoying one another in an infinitely beautiful and glorious new world.

[21 : 37] C.S. Lewis, in the last of his Narnia books, the last battle, he has this scene where he describes what glory is going to be like. And in this scene, the four children, Lucy, Edmund, Susan, and Peter, grab some fruit in this picture of eternity.

And they eat this fruit. And C.S. Lewis says, what was the fruit like? Well, how can you describe a taste? All I can say is that the very sweetest strawberry you've ever eaten, the very sweetest melon, the most delicious pear you've ever eaten, will feel wooden, flowery, hard, and disgusting compared to that which is to come.

He says, Think of the most beautiful day that you've ever experienced. And compared to the glory of eternity, the bluest sky will seem overcast and dull, depressing and anxiety-producing.

The very greenest vistas you've ever seen will seem dry and dead, archaic, compared to the glory that's to come. He's trying to find this language to say, the very best thing that you've experienced in this world will seem depressing and old and archaic and dying compared to the world that's to come.

Friends, Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a first-fruit prototype of the world that we've got to look forward to for those of us that are in Christ. That's good news.

[23 : 06] But there's something actually more important than all of that about the resurrection. There's something more significant about what Jesus' resurrection means. And that is, not only has Jesus' resurrection secured for us a glorious world, which is certain and wonderful, even more startling, is that in many ways, Jesus' resurrection secures for us the world that's to come is in some ways already here today.

Okay, now you're going to need to follow me here because this is going to be a little theological. Okay, are you ready? Thank you, Iris. Okay, great. In the New Testament, Jesus' resurrection was not just an isolated event that was unique to Jesus as the Son of God, but rather Jesus' resurrection from the dead was the beginning or something, an event that set in motion a whole new entire world to come.

Okay? Let me say it this way. Jesus' resurrection from the dead, Jesus' death and resurrection, was not just a historical event that happened 2,000 years ago. It was the inauguration of an entire new universe or cosmos or world that began then.

So, let me quote N.T. Wright, who's one of the greatest philosophers and theologians on this point. Listen to how N.T. Wright says it. He says, In the New Testament, the point of the resurrection is not simply that the Creator God has done something remarkable for one solitary individual, but that in and through the resurrection, the present evil age has been invaded by the age to come.

A time of return, restoration and renewal. An event has occurred and as a result, the world is a different place. Human beings have a new possibility to become a completely different kind of people.

[25 : 08] Okay? Do you see what he's saying? Because of the resurrection, the present evil age in which we live has been invaded by the world to come. And in some ways, that world is beginning to bear fruit in our lives.

N.T. Wright is saying this. Not only does the resurrection of Jesus guarantee that one day when we die, we will have a magnificent resurrection bodies that will participate in this new glorious creation, in the new heaven and new earth, but in fact, that glorious new world has in some way, in seed form, partially but significantly, begun in our world today for those that are in Christ.

Jesus' death and resurrection began or set in motion something that will culminate with his return when he defeats all his enemies, when he crushes evil, when he hands back the kingdom of God to his father, and when he reigns for all glory with those that are in Christ.

Jesus' resurrection was a deliberate invasion, a repudiation, a reversal of the present sin-ravaged, pain-saturated, death-stained, God-denying world by the kingdom of God to come.

And friends, for those of us that are in Christ, we get to participate in that world here and now. It's kind of like, let me see if this analogy makes sense, it's kind of like when a couple are married and they're trying to have kids and the wife falls pregnant.

[26 : 47] In some ways, your life doesn't change too much. You're still the same person. You still go to work. You still go to the shops. You don't get transformed from this world to another kingdom.

You still live in this world. But in another sense, the age to come invades your life and turns your whole world upside down. You start off maybe feeling a little bit nauseous, right?

You start to see everything in the world differently. Suddenly you start to see public transport and you think, I wonder how a pram will fit on that bus or that MTR system. Suddenly you start looking at the packaging and the labels on all sorts of foods that you eat.

In some ways, your whole world is different because the age to come, the world that is going to be yours in nine months' time has invaded your world in anticipation of what's to come.

And yet, in many ways, you're still the same person. The resurrection of Jesus is the inauguration, has set in motion a series of events in which the entire world changes for those that are in Christ.

[27 : 57] Listen to how Tim Keller puts it. He says this, The resurrection was indeed a miraculous display of God's power. But we should not see it as a suspension of the natural order of the world.

Rather, it is the beginning of the restoration of the natural order of the world. The world as God intended it to be. Okay? Do you get that? We shouldn't see the miracle of the resurrection as a suspension of the natural order like God just said, Okay, I'm just going to pause how things are going to be.

I'm going to do a miracle and then things are going to go back to the natural order. Actually, the resurrection was a restoration of how the world as God intended it to be actually is.

The resurrection means not merely that Christians have a hope for the future, but that we have a hope that comes from the future that begins now.

The Bible's startling message is that when Jesus rose from the dead, he brought the future, majestic, glorious, life-giving kingdom of God into our present world here and now.

[29 : 07] I hope that's not too philosophical. Jesus' resurrection doesn't just change things for when you die. It changes the entire way you see the world now.

The resurrection of Jesus means that Christians, as one author put it, living in heaven even as we live on earth, living in the future even as we live in the present. And when you think about it, what that means is the entire Christian life is a participation in the world to come.

That's why, what it means is Christians say, I'm a sojourner on this world, I'm a citizen of the world to come. It's saying, I'm not my own, but I belong, body and soul, to Christ.

It's saying, it's no longer I who live, but it's Christ who lives in me. The resurrection means that Christians say, I'm willing to count all the treasures of this world as rubbish in order that I may know Christ and the power of his resurrection, even as I participate in the sufferings of this world.

Romans chapter 6 puts it like this, when Jesus died, we died with him. And when Jesus raised, he was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father so that we might walk in newness of life in this world today.

[30 : 31] Friends, do you know what that means? It means for those of us that are in Christ by faith, everything changes. Because the resurrection of Jesus from the dead doesn't just mean good news for the future one days, it means the good news of the future has invaded our world now.

It means that in through the resurrection, in the present evil age, God has invaded our world with the age to come. And as a result, the world is a different place.

And those that are in Christ have the new possibility of being utterly different kinds of people. Jesus' resurrection changes everything.

Everything. And when we look at the New Testament, one of the things that's amazing is that you see in everything that the apostles write about, they appeal to the hope of the resurrection, the will to come, to deal with every issue in life.

The resurrection changes the way that we see money. It changes the way that we see our desires. It changes the way that we handle success. It changes the way we handle disappointment.

[31 : 41] It changes the way we handle failure. It changes the way we handle hurt and betrayal. It changes the way that we view our bodies and sexuality. The resurrection of Jesus changes absolutely everything.

Friends, if you do not understand what Jesus did when he died and rose again from the grave, if you do not understand what Jesus is doing in this world by way of his resurrection, you'll forever be anxious, frustrated, super busy, overworked, frantically running around and yet paradoxically you'll be unfulfilled, desperately trying to secure for yourself some kind of heaven on earth on your own terms.

Friends, why is it that our city, and maybe you're one of them, is so frantically running around, extra busy, never able to rest, never able to slow down?

It's because we are frantically trying to secure for ourselves the heaven on earth. But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus died not just to take our sins upon himself to do that, but Jesus rose again so that we don't need to anxiously secure for ourselves heaven on earth.

Jesus came to invest and invade our sin-laden, death-stained, pain-saturated world with his kingdom, with his heaven on earth.

[33 : 08] And so, as we come to land, let's think about a couple of things practically. Think about what this means for the way we think about money.

We are all economic beings and we live in an economic world. And Jesus says that money is neither a good thing nor a bad thing. Money has no moral values, morally neutral.

But remember Jesus' very famous words in Matthew chapter 6, what Jesus said, is, he says, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroy, thieves do not break in and steal.

And then he says, for where your heart is, there your treasure will be as well. Now when Jesus is talking about heaven and earth, he's not talking about a geographical place. Store up for yourselves treasures up there in the sky, not here on earth.

Jesus is not talking about a temporal place like store up, do not spend your money now, but invest it for the future. He's not talking about a time frame. What he's saying is that how, he's saying you can see and use money in a this present world sense, or you can see it in the kingdom of God sense.

[34 : 27] And how you see it is going to determine not just what you do with money, but with what it does to you. How you see money is going to determine whether you're a slave to it, or whether you're a master of it.

Whether it controls you, or whether you're free from it. Jesus says that how we see this world and our participation in this world will transform the way we handle something very tangible like our wealth.

Or think of sexuality. In our day, we live in a day and age in which our culture tells us that sexuality and sex is both everything and nothing all at the same time.

It's everything because if you are not having lots of it, you are nothing. But it's also nothing because it doesn't really mean anything. You can have it with as many people as you want, as often as you want.

Our culture tells us that our sexuality is just a matter of personal preference. It's my body, I get to do what I want with it. And in fact, we see this in the book of Corinthians. Look at what Paul says here in chapter 15.

[35 : 30] He says in verse 32, if the dead are not raised, if God's kingdom doesn't invade our world, well then let's just eat and drink for tomorrow we die. Let's do whatever we want.

You only live once, right? YOLO, live it up. Do whatever you want because you only have one life. In fact, the Corinthians had a saying. They said, as the stomach is for food and food is for the stomach, so the body is for sex and sex is for the body.

In other words, this is my body. Let me fulfill my appetites. Do what I want with it. But look at how Paul writes to the Corinthians. He says this in chapter 7. He says, don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit whom you have from God?

You are not your own. You were bought with a price. You belong to God. Glorify God with your bodies. The Corinthians were saying, listen, our body is just, it's a material thing.

One day we're going to die. We're going to be laid in the grave. Who cares? Our spirits will go and be with God in heaven, but what we do with our bodies is for me just to maximize my own enjoyment. Let me just live it now and maximize my pleasure.

[36 : 35] And Paul says, don't you see that your body is part of the kingdom of God to come? How you steward your body actually makes a difference. You are participating with your body in the kingdom of God in this life.

Use your body as an agent, as a tool, as a vessel for the kingdom of God to come. Sam Albury, who is a pastor in the UK, a man who lives with the daily reality of being sexually attracted to other men, he says all his life, as long as he knows, he's had homosexual desires, and yet he's come to see that his body belongs not to himself, but to Christ as part of the kingdom of God in this world.

And so he's chosen to steward his body for the glory of God and to retain, to restrain his sexual desires. And so listen to what Sam Albury writes.

He says, as a follower of Jesus, we will all incur some cost. Whatever our cost of discipleship may be, however much we may have to lose out in the course of following Jesus, Jesus shows us that even in this life, in this world, it will be worth it.

Sam Albury's not saying, I'll suffer now, but don't worry, one day when I get to heaven, it'll all be worth it. As a follower of Jesus, the kingdom of God has invaded my world now.

[37 : 59] And actually, the price I pay now will be all worth it in this world because what I do with my body is a participation in the glorious kingdom of God in this life.

Lastly, let's think about this. We could think about suffering. What about suffering? Look at what Paul says in our passage in verse 30. He says, if the resurrection is not true, if all our hope is in what we have in this world, why do we suffer?

Why do we allow ourselves to be put in danger? Why do we allow ourselves to be tortured, abused, taken advantage of? Why not just avoid suffering at all costs?

And the answer, well, Paul writes to Corinthians in another chapter, in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, and this is what he says. He says, as followers of Jesus, we are afflicted in every way, but we are not crushed.

We are perplexed, but we are not driven to despair. We are persecuted, but we are not forsaken. We are struck down in this life, but we are not destroyed, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us from the dead and bring us into his presence.

[39 : 11] You see what he's saying there? In the midst of our suffering, in the midst of persecution, in the midst of opposition, we live knowing that our life is in Christ's hands, the risen, the risen, resurrected Jesus.

He says, for this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things of this world that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

Friends, throughout the whole New Testament, the Christians are those who view hardship, who view suffering, difficulty, even debt, in a completely upside-down counter-intuitive paradigm because of what?

Because of the hope of the resurrection, because Jesus died and rose again, because Jesus' kingdom has invaded this world. And so look at what Paul says at the final verse of our chapter in verse 15.

He says, Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, be immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in Christ Jesus your suffering, your work, your labor, is not in vain.

[40 : 23] Friends, what is your greatest longing of your heart this morning? What is your greatest fear this morning? The resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, means that God is able to invade both your deepest longings and your deepest fears with His glorious resurrection, life-giving power, even today.

Jesus is not just saying, Hold on, because one day it'll be good. Jesus is not just saying, Best of luck, but one day when you die, it'll all be worth it.

Jesus is able to say, Your deepest longings, your deepest fears, your deepest pain, even in this life, is invaded and infused, able to me, if you'll look to me in faith, with my resurrection power and life.

Colossians, Paul writes, and he says, Christ in us, the hope of glory. Not just one day when we die, Christ in us now, the hope of glory.

Friends, Christians are those who live in heaven while still on earth, living in the future while being in the present. I want to close with the story. In the mid-17th century, 1665, a long time ago, in the UK, there was a great plague called the Bubonic Plague, I think it was, the Great Plague.

[41 : 52] And it first struck London and thousands of people were dying. Whoever contracted this plague essentially would die. It was like COVID on steroids.

Hundreds, thousands of people in the city of London were dying. And they didn't know how to cure it. They didn't know what to do. Anyone that got infected died. And what happened was that in 1665, a small town, a very small village actually called Eam, up in the north of the UK, in Derbyshire, a cloth manufacturer, a tradesman, bought some cloth from London and it got sent up to this village.

It was wet and so the tradesman took this piece of cloth when it arrived in his store and he shook it out and he hung it up to dry in front of the fireplace to dry out this cloth.

And the fleas that were embedded in this cloth were carrying the plague. And so this tradesman contracted the plague himself and then two or three weeks later he had died.

But in those three weeks he had spread the plague to others. And so in a couple of weeks and months people in this village started to die. August 1665.

[43 : 09] September, October, November, hundreds of people start dying. And by the mid-1666, a year later, I think over a hundred people had already died in this village.

And people were starting to flee the village because they didn't want to contract the plague. And so they started to flee. One lady had, in a matter of eight days, buried her husband and her six children.

Buried them all in a matter of eight days. One man realized there's something we need to do. And so the vicar of the town, his name was William Mompison, realized that we are probably going to die but if we all flee to the other villages we're going to spread the plague to them and they're going to die as well.

And so he came up with this idea. He said, we as a village need to self-isolate. We need to lock down the village and make sure nobody comes in and nobody goes out. And we will die but it will save the other villages from the plague.

But the problem was he was a new vicar and so nobody really trusted him. He didn't have any credibility. The previous vicar had been fired by the bishops in London.

[44 : 23] But the previous vicar still stayed on the outskirts of the village. And so the new vicar went to the old vicar, his name was Edward Stanley, and said, I have a plan. The only way that we can save the other surrounding villages is if we isolate and lock down the village.

But the people won't trust me but they will trust you. Will you help me convince the village? And so these two pastors went back to the village, the man agreed, and they spoke to the village and they said, we will die so that others can find life.

And they convinced the village to lock themselves down. Nobody could come in, nobody could go out so that the surrounding towns would live. William Opherson, his wife died, and he writes a letter to her parents.

And in this letter, he writes of how the fact that in the early days, she was encouraged to flee the town. But she decided to stay and to spend her life and to die in order to save not just the people in the village but the villages around her.

And he writes to her parents and he says that she had this hope, this incredible hope that came from her faith in who Christ was. Hope not just in the world to come but a hope that allowed her to suffer in this world and that allowed her to die well.

[45 : 50] Friends, do you see how the resurrection of the dead, Jesus from the dead, doesn't just mean that one day all will be made well. That's true but it actually empowers and it changes the way we see everything.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead means that our life in this world is invaded with the kingdom of God. It means it changes the way that you handle criticism. It changes the way that you handle disappointments.

It changes the way you handle money and power and sexuality and desires and forgiveness and bitterness and hurt. It changes the way you handle success and it changes the way you handle failure.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead changes absolutely everything. And friends, when the glory of the resurrection of Jesus and all that it holds for us in this life, when it impacts not just our heads but our hearts, it'll change our life and it'll set you free from the fear of missing out.

It'll set you free from needing to build your kingdom in this world. Friends, when it gets inside of us, it'll empower us to live the most radical life you could possibly imagine because you'll no longer be banking your life and your hope in the things of this world but on Him who has invaded this world with the world to come.

[47 : 07] Let's pray together before we take communion. Oh Lord Jesus Christ, our great and glorious King, You, O God, who are Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end and everything in between.

You, O God, who are sovereign over days and dominions, over death and darkness, but even over tiny flowers of the field. You, Lord Jesus, who are making all things new.

Father, I pray that You will infuse and invade our hearts with the hope of the resurrection, that You'll invade our hearts with the will to come. God, I pray for those of us that are in You, that are in Christ, that by faith that we, God, will live, not just with the hope that we can hold on to the will to come, but that Your kingdom come will invade our lives, that we will live in heaven as it is on earth, that God, even in our city, may it be in Hong Kong as it is in heaven, because You, God, have placed us here, because You, God, are invading our hearts with Your kingdom, power, and life.

Jesus, won't You come and fill us afresh with Your Spirit? Won't You come and change our lives? Won't You make us courageous and bold and allow us to live radical lives of sacrifice, because we know our lives are not only found in the kingdom of this world, but are found in You.

Jesus, come and have Your way, we pray. Come and open the eyes of our hearts in Your wonderful and Your glorious name.

[48 : 55] Amen.