

**Luke 24:1-12;
1 Peter 1:1-5**

Easter

April 21, 2019

Living Hope

The greatest thing found on Easter wasn't a basket or some eggs... It was an empty tomb. His resurrection is the hinge of history on which hangs the fate of humanity. Some may ask what's the big deal here? Why is it important that Jesus actually rose from death? The Bible makes it quite clear that He rose physically – the tomb was empty, no body, no bones ever found (even to this day). Here's why that's important:

Since the dawn of time humans have been trying to make sense of life. They've devised rituals based upon folktales, mythological heroes and heroines, representations of the metaphysical and untamed powers, local and national deities designed to understand death. That's what religion is.

But Jesus was history! Of Him you can speak of time, place, his birth, his life, miracles, death and ... changed lives and new life. In Jesus Christ and his resurrection God entered time. Because of Him we are no longer alone, creating stories to explain the inexplicable, for God's story has intersected our stories. He has entered our stories to bring living hope.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we wouldn't know about Him. But in fact He did rise from death. Yet though it is true, it happened a long time ago, far, far away, so how can the resurrection of Jesus do anything for you or me? Well, first off let's acknowledge a simple truth:

Life Is Tough

We all know, or will soon know, that life is hard ... though we all wish or think it should be easy. It's been that way since the dawn of time. Ever since humans turned away from their Creator, to trust in them selves alone to make life what it cannot be without God, life has been hard. That is why brokenness and pain and hardship permeate life. And what awaits us at the end? When humans choose to turn from the One who said, "Let there be light," they find themselves facing the darkness ... an unending darkness.

Death Defeated

But there is an alternative to this sad picture. It is Jesus' resurrection, which intersects our stories. Not only does it vindicate His life and teachings, it also soundly defeats death. On the cross Jesus took into Himself all the bad stuff that all of humanity has in itself and let it all die with Him. So that bad stuff – including our own bad choices – all of which have their roots in turning

away from God ... all that was defeated in it's bid to control our lives. That's why we repeat these words: ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life,”*** John 3:16.

Author C. S. Lewis put it this way, **“He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death.”**¹ The darkness and loneliness of death, including – hear me now - including the little deaths that we all experience on a regular basis in every instance of broken relationships, in every broken promise, every broken hope, misdeed, and lie that we also commit ... all the things that leave emotional and spiritual scars and even Death with a capital **“D”** that awaits us in the grave ... all of that is defeated by Christ's resurrection.

Resurrection Doubted

A recent survey (2016 Rasmussen) shows that almost three-quarters of Americans believe in the resurrection. But if you ask them why it matters not many could give an answer that has much to do with the teaching of the Bible or the Christian faith. Most Americans have a general (if vague) belief in some kind of life after death – some kind of immortality of the soul notion – not much different from many other cultures before us.

Why is it so difficult to believe God can raise the dead? Life itself is a miracle, really. The whole of creation and the known universe is a wonder to behold! When you consider the complexity of just our human bodies, it is a mind-boggling miracle how it all functions in harmony! That's why we notice, so painfully, when something isn't working right.

The Bible speaks of Christ's rising from the dead as the first event of its kind in all of the history of the universe. The resurrection of Jesus was not just one miracle (though that would be astounding enough) rather, it was the decisive beginning of the general resurrection and God's final redemption of all things. God's new creation began with the resurrection of Jesus. That is what St. Paul is talking about when he writes: ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*** 2 Corinthians 5:17.

The old creation (Adam and Eve), human nature, we know is flawed and fatal. The new creation, heralded in Christ's resurrection, brings into being all that God originally intended. All the brokenness and evil, all despair and guilt that comes from all your broken relationships, weaknesses, faults, and sin, are embedded in your old nature. With Christ you attach yourself to a better future, better than if you keep clinging to your old nature.

Do you believe that people can be made new? How about you?

Living Hope

St. Peter, one of those who was actually with Jesus before and after His death and resurrection, wrote this: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1 Peter 1:3. Living hope... Take a look at your own life: honest people will admit that life isn't what it should be, because people mess up. Really honest people admit that they are just as much a part of the problem as anyone else. This is what the Bible calls sin and it brings death, including all those little deaths we experience regularly. That's what Jesus took with Him to the cross – all of it, for everyone. When He rose from the tomb, He left our sin and death behind, in the grave where it all belongs. And this can be yours today: *The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus, Romans 6:10-11. That's real living!**

“Amazing Grace,” was at one time deemed the most popular Christian hymn in America. John Newton was the captain of a slave trading ship, until his heart was pierced by the word of God, revealing to him the monstrous sin he was committing. “Amazing Grace” is his testimony to what Jesus did for him, “a wretch” as he put it. He left the slave trade (meaning he repented of it) and found new life, through the healing power of the Holy Spirit. Eventually he became a pastor in London, a calling that gave him more fulfillment than he had ever before experienced. That's why he wrote: “I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see.”² He was living in hope because Christ had resurrected him from a life full of death.

It still happens today. Take Christopher Yuan, who struggled with his identity and felt alienated from his family. He dropped out of dental school, when near completion, to revel in a wild and carefree life of parties and sex, fueled by drugs. The drugs landed him in prison – federal prison. Broken, he finally turned to God, confessing and repenting of his life to that point. Slowly he began to rise. But then, behind bars, he got the devastating news that he was HIV positive. Only living hope in Jesus kept him going. Today he is a new man, living free, speaking at conferences, restored to his family, guarding his health, and praising God. He writes: “It's hard for me to forget the day I returned home, with our front foyer covered with yellow ribbons. Each time I think about it, God's mercy washes over me, and I'm reminded of my parents' unconditional love for me.”³ And there's even more to the story: his ordeal also brought his parents to Christ in whom they, and their relationships, were healed. That's living hope!

I know others ... a personal friend and his wife who, as “empty nesters,” at a time when most people look to retirement, took in two foster kids ... kids from troubled origins. Then they adopted them and life was not without its difficulties. Those two kids today are successful, healthy young adults. Living hope in Christ’s resurrection, through this man and his wife, brought life to two kids who otherwise might well have been lost.

There are several even in this congregation who are similarly giving life to children whom they have adopted. They are examples of living hope in Jesus. I thank God for them. Maybe you know other stories. It could be your story: maybe you’ve been through, or are going through, the grievous loss of a loved one, maybe you or someone close to you has experienced the pain of a divorce; it could be you’re trapped in some besetting sin or addiction of substance or sex or anger; maybe your body has betrayed you, your health has crashed, or a debilitating injury has sidelined you; it could be a loved one, a child or spouse, who has gone astray into a destructive life. You know what it is ... it’s just there that Jesus’ resurrection intersects your story, your life; inviting you away from victimhood and bitterness, which our old nature so easily slides into, and instead bringing you into His victory over it all, healing your wounds and giving you joy. That’s a living hope! When you attach yourself to Him ... deeply, in that very place of death ... when you attach yourself to Him right there you will begin to rise with Him. “Made like Him, like Him we rise, Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.” Yeah, His resurrection is a big deal!

Glorious Victory

Easter is really about God’s victory over all the brokenness and death that we face! Jesus’ Resurrection means that He has power now to convey His life to you and me. Eternal life is not a gift from God eternal life is the gift of God...God with us. The energy and the power manifested in Jesus will be manifested in us by the sheer grace of God when once we have attached ourselves to Him. *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his, Romans 6:5.* That’s living in hope!

Before us is the greatest opportunity on earth. Don’t miss it! Thank God His resurrection is gloriously and majestically true!

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*.

² John Newton “Amazing Grace,” 1799.

³ Christopher Yuan, *Out Of A Far Country*, p. 204.