

Resurrecting Hope
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We've all experienced a tough couple of years. And with all that is going on in our world today, many people have lost hope for their future. In fact, along with all the other shortages we are dealing with - hope is something that is in short supply these days.

A worldwide pandemic and endless threats of terrorism and war cause some people to be hopeless. Ever-increasing disasters: earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes – things we can do nothing about – can result in hopelessness.

We are dealing with inflation and rising interest rates. This will be the first generation of Americans who do not have the hope that they will do better than their parents financially. Young Americans are overwhelmingly pessimistic and hopeless about their future.

So - we face hopelessness on a world scale and a national scale – but also on a personal scale. Some have experienced a devastating loss this year. Some have lost family members and some have lost relationships and some have lost jobs.

These things and more can be so heavy that it may make some people question if God still cares about us and is still working in the world. Hopelessness is a pandemic today! That is so sad! And what's even sadder is that the rates of addiction and suicide are increasing exponentially because people have no hope!

But, the more I see our world falling apart, the more I believe that the Jesus Christ is the hope for our world. Because He is our hope – we can offer the world hope. But – we must have hope first, before we can offer it to others.

So, I am preaching today on Resurrecting Hope. Easter is all about hope to overcome life's greatest challenges. Easter is all about having hope even when it seems like our dream is dead and gone. As believers in Jesus Christ – we should always have hope because of Easter. 1 Peter 1:3 says:

In His great mercy God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

When we are born again God births us into a living hope. People who try to live their lives without God are without hope. Ephesians 2:12 says:

You lived in this world without God and without hope.

Yet – those people who trust in Jesus Christ are birthed into a living hope. Not just any kind of hope. Not a hope that comes and goes.

But a living hope. A lasting hope. A life-changing hope.

I submit to you today that hopelessness is not a result of circumstances. It's a result of misplaced faith! People who trust in other people to fix their problems are doomed to hopelessness. People who put their trust in government are doomed to hopelessness. People who put their trust in themselves are doomed to hopelessness. Psalm 118:8-9 says:

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in human leaders.

Hope comes from having faith in something bigger than ourselves. Hope comes through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Think about those original disciples who believed that Jesus was the Messiah who was going to usher the kingdom of God into the world. They believed it would be a literal kingdom on earth with Jesus as King. They had placed all their hopes and dreams in that, but they were crushed on that Friday when Jesus was crucified and buried in a tomb.

They had placed all of their hope in Him, and now He was dead. They believed that He truly was the Messiah and that through His life, He would change the world. But in their minds, that was all over.

It was not until a woman named Mary went to visit the tomb that hope was restored. The tomb was empty and Jesus had risen! Easter is the reminder that because Jesus is alive, we have hope.

As I was praying about this sermon, I prayed a prayer I pray every time I preach: God, what do you want to say through this sermon. You see, I can say some good stuff – but you don't need good words from me – you need a word from God! My words may inform you – but God's word will transform you!

As I was praying and studying on hope – which I have preached on many times – I felt the Lord saying that too many believers have an incomplete view of hope. Specifically – they are confused about the difference between hoping FOR and hoping IN. The Bible teaches us to hope in God and to hope for God to do things on our behalf. For example - Hebrews 11:1 says:

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

It is okay to hope for things. It is right and biblical to hope for God to save your family, to heal your sickness, to set you free from addictions, to provide for your needs, to protect you from harm.

That is one level of hope. But there is another level of hope. And that level is to hope in God no matter what!

To hope in Him whether or not what you hope for happens when or how you want it to.

You see, when some people say they hope in God, they are actually only hoping for God to do something about their situation. And if God doesn't come through exactly like they want when they want – they fall away because their hope was only in what they wanted from God – their hope was not IN God.

And even when I talk about resurrecting hope – many will think that means that something they lost hope FOR will happen: Like their dead marriage or career or dream will be resurrected.

It's okay to hope for things – it is not okay to put your hope in things. Many people put their hope in money. If I only had more money, everything will be okay. But 1 Timothy 6:17 says:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

You might say, "But I'm not rich." But an average income in America places you in the top wage earners in the world. And by the way – you can have zero money and still place your hope in money. But resurrecting hope goes way beyond that! I'm talking about having hope in God no matter what else is resurrected.

The disciples of Christ had this exact problem. Their problem was based on a misunderstanding of Scripture and a lack of faith in what Jesus told them. That resulted in disappointment and discouragement in the disciples.

Their scriptural misunderstanding had to do with Messianic prophecies. There are over 300 prophecies about the messiah given by 30 prophets over thousands of years – all of which came to pass in one person – Jesus Christ. No other person who has ever lived or ever will live can have all these prophecies come true in their lives. This shows the supernatural origin of Christ and of the Bible.

People in the time of Christ believed that the Messiah would come to earth and usher in the kingdom of God. So, the disciples of Christ believed that He would physically defeat Rome and rule the earth and they would rule with Him.

There are many prophecies in the Bible about the coming of a Messiah – a Savior – a Deliverer – a King. They had their facts right – they just had the timing wrong. They did not understand that Jesus came the first time as a suffering Servant – but He's coming back as a conquering King!

They believed all the Scriptures about the Messiah being a King – but they overlooked the Scriptures about Him coming to earth to die first.

Not only did the disciples misinterpret Scripture – but they did not understand or believe that Jesus would be killed and rise again in 3 days. Jesus told them over and over – about 20 times – that this would happen. For instance – Matthews 16:21-23 says:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Not only did the disciples not believe Jesus, Peter actually rebuked Jesus for even saying it! Matthew 20:17-21 shows how far they missed what Jesus said.

Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!"

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of Him. "What is it you want?" He asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at Your right and the other at Your left in your kingdom."

Jesus told them that He was about to be killed, but He would come back to life. They so missed His point that questions were asked about sitting next to Jesus in His kingdom. They were not talking about heaven – but an earthly kingdom.

Luke 18:31-34 says:

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. On the third day He will rise again." The disciples did not understand any of this. The significance of His words was hidden from them, and they failed to grasp what He was talking about.

Jesus could not have been any clearer about how He would be killed and then He would come back to life. But the disciples were clueless.

And they continued to be clueless. After Jesus was resurrected, He appeared to 2 hopeless disciples who were going back home to Emmaus because they thought Jesus was dead. In Luke 24:17-21 He asked them:

"What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?" They stood still,

with sad faces. One of them, named Cleopas, asked Him, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?"

"What things?" He asked. "The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything He said and did. Our chief priests and rulers handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and He was crucified. And we had hoped that He would be the one who would redeem and set Israel free. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

They were still believing for Jesus to overthrow Rome and set up His kingdom. But they ended their story with Jesus dead because they lost hope. They were standing the presence of the One called Resurrection and Life and they were talking like He was dead!

And many of us are so hopeless that our stories end with Jesus dead! We have stories of defeat, but no victory! Luke 24:25-27 says:

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.

The disciples lost hope because they did not understand the Scriptures. They lost hope because they did not believe what Jesus Himself said about rising again in 3 days.

Did you catch where they said it has been 3 days since all this occurred? They should have known what was going to happen 3 days after Jesus died. They should have known He would rise again. They should have all been at the garden tomb waiting for Jesus to bust out in all His glory. But they did not believe and as a result, they were hopeless.

Even after Jesus resurrected and appeared to His disciples, they still asked Him in Acts 1:6-8

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In other words, stop worrying about when I will set up my physical kingdom on earth. I'm sending you the Holy Spirit to empower you to extend my spiritual kingdom on earth now!

Be careful of having hope FOR something without having hope IN God!

Don't allow your disappointment in what hasn't happened steal your hope in the God who is your only hope! Instead, do what David did. In Psalm 42 and 43 he talks of his tears because of his enemies. He talks of mourning because his enemies oppressed and mocked him. But 3 times he says the very same thing – as in Psalm 43:5

Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise Him again—my Savior and my God!

David is talking to himself. He acknowledges his feeling of discouragement and sadness, but he doesn't just stop there. David said, In spite of my emotions – I will put my hope in God and I will praise Him as my Savior and God!

Listen - you are going to have emotions in life – we all do – but you cannot allow your emotions to control your life. Some people allow their emotions to cause them to become hopeless. What you must learn to do in those times of discouragement is to put your hope in God. Not just hoping for God to change your circumstances – but choosing to trust Him no matter what. We must trust Him and praise Him even when we feel hopeless.

One of my favorite passages is Habakkuk 3:17-19 which says:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,

Now remember – when this was written the economy was based on agriculture. So – he is saying even if the economy fails, even if no one has a job, even if gas goes up to \$10 a pint, even if everything falls apart...

yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to go on the heights.

We need to do the same thing when we face tough times – we need to add the yet. When you are in a tough time, add the word but and something to rejoice about. For instance:

I hate my job – BUT – thank God I am employed.

I don't like driving to work in this traffic – BUT – thank God I have a car.

I don't like every school subject – BUT – thank God I'm getting educated.

There's always something to rejoice in.

Sometimes God removes the hard high places. But sometimes He doesn't.

Instead He enables us to walk over those hard high places.

So, praise Him for that!

Giving a sacrifice of praise when you do not feel like it will turn hopelessness into hope.

Why? Because Hebrews 6:19 says:

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.

Praise gets us into God's presence where we find an anchor called hope. And hope is the opposite of disappointment.

When you're disappointed you want to run, but hope will anchor you. When you're disappointed you feel like giving up and going back, but hope will anchor you.

I encourage you today, overcome your disappointment by praising God until you get into His presence and your soul gets anchored in hope! Psalm 71:14 says:

But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.

Believers should always be filled with hope and praise. Why? Because Jesus came to earth the first time as the Lamb that was slain – but He rose again and is coming back as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah!

He came the first time submitted to kings in earthly authority – but He's coming back as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

The first time Jesus was a baby dressed in swaddling clothes; the second time He's wearing a robe dipped in blood!

He came the first time to die; but He is coming back to raise the dead.

The first time He wore a crown of thorns; the next time He will wear a crown of glory.

The first time He died on a cross; He's coming back as a conquering King.

The first time He came in meekness; He is coming again in majesty.

The first time He came in poverty; the next time He is coming in power.

The first time He rode a lowly donkey into Jerusalem; when He comes back He will be a conquering King riding a white horse leading the armies of heaven. His eyes will be a flame of fire and out of His mouth will go a sharp sword. His name will be written on His thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

When He comes again every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Are you ready for that great and glorious day?
Are you ready to meet your God?