

Resurrection Hope

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 24, verses 1 through 12. If you're there, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together.

! But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.

Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified. And on the third day, rise.

And they remembered his words.

[1 : 47] They were lost by themselves. And he went home marveling at what had happened. May God add a blessing to the reading of his Word. Lord, would you please be seated? Amen. And he went into that space and forced to play board games that students from previous years had ravaged.

The boxes were torn and ripped. Many of the pieces were missing, making the game virtually impossible to play, which added to the frustration and the feeling that our classroom was a prison cell.

But there was one game, and it came in a durable, cylindrical container. It didn't have dice or cards or other small pieces that could easily be lost.

The pieces of this game were rectangular blocks of wood. And the game that I'm talking about is Jenga. Jenga. You've probably played Jenga before.

You build a tower in perpendicular rows of three. Players take turns removing a single block, which adversely affects the integrity of the structure.

[3 : 25] And the goal of the game is to avoid removing that piece that would make the whole structure fall over. There's another aspect of Jenga that's different from most other multiplayer games.

And that's instead of having one winner and a bunch of losers, Jenga has one loser and a bunch of winners. And so that added to the intensity of those games that we would play, because you didn't want to be the loser.

You didn't want to be the one to remove the block that sent the structure crashing down. So you had to be very methodical and meticulous when it came your turn to remove a block from that structure.

The pieces that were easiest to remove were the pieces at the top, the pieces that didn't bear much weight. Nobody removed the outside blocks on that bottom row first, because that bottom row bore all of the weight.

It was too risky of a move. The game was doomed to end quickly if you tried to do that. If you've played Jenga, you know this.

[4 : 44] Now you're probably wondering, what does Jenga have to do with Luke 24, verses 1 through 12, and why am I talking about it on Easter? Well, like those bottom outside corner pieces, the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day is a corner piece, a cornerstone of Christianity that, if removed, will cause all of our doctrines to crumble.

If Jesus did not rise after he died, if the tomb was not empty, then Christianity would be based on a lie. If Jesus lied, then he's not God.

And if he's not God, then his death did not atone for our sins. And if his death did not atone for our sins, then we are all doomed. Death wins.

We all lose. We lose. We lose bad, and we lose big. As the Apostle Paul said, as we've heard this morning in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 13 through 19, 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.

[6 : 12] 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 also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we, Christians, are of all people most to be pitied. John MacArthur said, If there is no resurrection, preaching Christ would be senseless.

Faith in Christ would be useless. All the witnesses and preachers of the resurrection would be liars. No one would be redeemed from sin. All former believers would have perished, and Christians would be the most pitiable on earth.

That would be true. If Christianity was based on malleable opinions, wishful thinking, or people who contrived Jesus' resurrection as a means to dupe and fleece others of their resources.

But that's not what happened. And that isn't what Christianity is truly about. Because what we believe is based on facts. A fact.

[7 : 25] On the third day, after his body was ripped, torn, and shredded by the whips of Roman soldiers, and pierced by nails that mounted his flesh to the cross, as Jesus hung there, suspended between heaven and earth, as he who knew no sin became sin, smitten, afflicted, forsaken by the Father for our sins, giving his life to give us life, after mustering what little strength he had left to fill his oxygen-deprived lungs with enough air to cry out, It is finished!

Jesus died! After a spear was plunged into his side, verifying that, in fact, he was truly dead, after they removed his body and placed it in a borrowed tomb, after all of that, the fact is, the truth is, reality is that on the third day, the tomb was empty.

As the Apostle Paul continues to make this point in 1 Corinthians 15, he states that it is this fact that makes all the difference for you and for me.

Verses 20 through 22. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by one 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. As J.A. Shep said famously, The resurrection is God's amen to Jesus' loud cry, It is finished!

[9 : 07] And therefore, the guarantee that by Jesus' death, the believer has indeed been reconciled to God and made righteous. The resurrection wasn't just some thing the disciples preached after Jesus rose and ascended back to heaven.

It was at the core of their message. It was foundational to the gospel they proclaimed. It was the most controversial aspect of what they preached.

At Pentecost, on the day the church was born, Peter emphasized the fact of Christ's resurrection in Acts 2, 23 through 24. This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. It was for preaching the resurrection that Paul and John were imprisoned by leaders of Israel.

It was for preaching the resurrection that the apostle Paul was ridiculed by the Greek philosophers in Athens. It was for preaching the resurrection that many of the disciples ultimately were executed.

[10 : 25] People don't typically give their lives in exchange for hopeless causes, or for wishful thinking, or to uphold some kind of a scheme. They knew it was true, because they had witnessed it firsthand.

The tomb was empty. Death was defeated because Jesus, in fact, rose again. The church has always understood the importance of the resurrection.

Throughout its history, it has met on Sunday, which commemorates the day Jesus was resurrected. The church does not meet on Friday, because Easter Sunday is the interpretation and the validation of what took place on Good Friday.

The resurrection is the divine vindication of the work of Jesus, and what he did on the cross. The cross means nothing without the empty tomb. The resurrection vindicates the gospel that we believe and that we preach.

The good news of the gospel is not just that believers might experience forgiveness of sin, but rather that having been forgiven, they will live forever in the bliss of heaven, in glorified, physical, resurrected bodies.

[11 : 44] As we read in 1 John 3, 2, Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Is this not what you desire? Is this not what you long for? Is this not why people diet and exercise and undergo operations and cosmetic surgeries so that they can look alive and stay alive?

We want to live. We want to look alive. Have you ever stopped to wonder why that is? I'll tell you. Because God, your creator, is an eternal being. He's made you in his image. As we read in Ecclesiastes 3.11, He, God, has made everything beautiful in its time.

Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. In other words, God has made us for his eternal purposes, and nothing in this sin-cursed world can bring us complete satisfaction outside of him.

[13 : 17] St. Augustine phrased it well when he said, God, you have made us for yourself. Oh, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

Put another way, C.S. Lewis observed, if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we are made for another world.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not the epilogue. It's not the post-credit scene in the story of Christianity.

It's at its core. It's a truth that satisfies the longing of our hearts to live. It is central to our conviction that the words Jesus spoke is true.

It is central to the message of the cross that by faith in Jesus, we are truly forgiven by his sacrifice. It is the fact, the proof that gives us certainty that in Christ, we live now and will live forever.

[14 : 32] However, it's at the cornerstone. It's a cornerstone of our faith. It's a promise. It's a reality that provides us with hope in a world full of despair.

So that's my main idea for this morning's sermon. That's what I hope you'll see this morning.

Resurrection. Jesus' resurrection provides hope in times of despair.

Jesus' resurrection provides hope in times of despair. I think the women who went to Jesus' tomb on that Sunday morning felt despair.

We know the disciples did because they were hiding in fear. They were secluding themselves from the outside world. They were no doubt confused as to how such a promising start could have such a gloomy end.

I'm sure they felt little hope for what the future might bring. But thankfully for them and for us, their feelings of despair lasted a few days.

[15 : 41] As they received news that the tomb was empty, their despair eventually gave way to life-changing hope. And their witness and their testimony to the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus have continually given hope to millions of people around the world.

Do you know that hope? Maybe today you feel restless, distressed, physically distressed, emotionally distressed, spiritually distressed.

Our passage today has hope for you. And my prayer is that God will use it to not only give you hope, but transformation in the fact that Jesus has risen and gives eternal life to those who believe in him.

So our text today contains three facts about that first Easter morning that demonstrate Jesus' resurrection provides hope in times of despair.

The first fact comes from the first three verses, which is that this was a perplexing scene. This was a perplexing scene. Look again with me at verse 1. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.

[17 : 17] Now, this is not perplexing if you know anything about Jewish custom and burial. The Jewish people did not have names for the days of the week like we do.

They numbered their days in relation to the Sabbath, which was the seventh day of the week. The first day, therefore, was Sunday, the day after the Sabbath.

Jewish law requires a person to be buried on the same day as his or her death. And then there was to be a seven-day mourning period that commenced.

According to Jewish custom, the day starts at nightfall and continues throughout the night and into the following day, as we know it, until the next night, which would bring a new day.

Jesus died late Friday afternoon. The Jews were not permitted on the Sabbath or Saturday to do any kind of work.

[18:22] So this was their first opportunity to finish the task of repairing Jesus' body for burial, or so the women believed. They knew Jesus' body had been wrapped by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, and they knew it had been placed in a tomb, and they knew where that was, a carved-out cave.

But they must not have known that those men had included spices in the wrappings, or maybe they knew or believed the thought had been done too quickly, since it was nightfall or it was fastly approaching.

And they were concerned that maybe the men did not do the job as well as they could have done it. Whatever the case may have been, one thing is for certain. They went to the tomb expecting to find the dead body of Jesus.

Now comes the perplexing part for them. Verse 3, And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Now, this may sound morbid, and while that's not my intent, I think it helps us to understand the mindset and the emotional state of these women as they saw the stone rolled away from the tomb.

[19:54] If we imagine ourselves in a similar scenario, imagine you've buried a loved one. You attended the funeral service.

You were at the graveside when they lowered the body into the ground. And you saw them fill the hole back in with the earth. A few days go by.

You go back to the graveside, and you see that the hole is back. Maybe the tombstone has been tipped over. You were courageous enough to peer over the edge and see that the casket is open, and the body has been taken out.

It's gone. What would you think? How would you feel? I believe you'd think a lot of things. I think you would be feeling a lot of things at once.

You would feel perplexed. As Luke describes these women in verse 4, they were perplexed about all of this. In the Greek, the verb translated perplexed is from *aporeo*, and it means to be at a loss with oneself, to be in doubt, to not know or be able to decide what to do.

[21:12] So maybe now you can relate at least a little bit as to how these women felt that day.

They would soon receive news that cleared up their confusion, but what I want you to think about for a moment is how perplexing the message of Christianity would be without the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I learned the lesson the hard way in seminary. We had 35 minutes to preach, and every sermon had to end with a gospel presentation.

Jesus lived sinlessly. He died sacrificially. He rose victoriously. And I got into the bad habit of leaving the resurrection out of my gospel presentation.

The first time I did it, my professor gave a kind reminder. The second time I did it, he said a little more annoyed, hey, you left Jesus in the tomb again.

The third time I did it, he gave me a pretty sharp rebuke. I remember he said something like this, Mike, if Jesus didn't rise again, then nothing of what you've just said matters at all.

[22:43] He was right. If Jesus didn't rise again, at best he's a good moral teacher, except that he said on multiple occasions that he would rise again after he died.

And if he wasn't resurrected, if the tomb wasn't empty, then that would mean that he was either a liar or a lunatic. It would make the claims of Christianity perplexing as well because the resurrection is essential to our faith.

I read this week that Elevation Church, a mega church with 25,000 members, decided not to use the term resurrection today, along with other words, because they think it will make visitors feel like outsiders.

They think they are being loving and welcoming by excluding this term. But Jesus' resurrection was not metaphorical. It was factual.

And the person who doesn't hear it and believe it will remain outside of heaven eternally, as Paul says in Romans 10, 9. Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[24 : 03] Jesus' resurrection provides us with the hope that we need. Jesus' claim that he has power to grant eternal life can be trusted because he himself conquered death.

The hope of humanity in these perplexing times that we live in is that there is hope of heaven. There is hope for eternal life. There is hope for sinners to be forgiven, to be saved, to be renewed, to be satisfied because Jesus has resurrected.

And his resurrection is a reality. So we saw the perplexing scene. Now we move on to the next fact, which is a predicted outcome.

A predicted outcome in verses 4 through 8. Let me read verse 4 through 7 again. While they were perplexed about this, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.

And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified on the third day.

[25 : 17] Now I respect these women for their courage and for their love for Jesus. Their plan involved waking up early in the morning while it was still dark outside, walking to Jesus' tomb, somehow finding a way to remove the stone, and then enter that cramped, cold, hard, windowless chamber, and unwrap, and then rewrap Jesus' corpse with the spices that they had brought.

Now, I've seen many of you walking around our church at night with the lights off, and I know how scared that makes you. So respect these ladies for their courage and their love, their dedication to the Lord, that they wanted to make sure that he had a respectful burial.

But again, they did not expect to find the living among the dead. And then suddenly, they realized they were not alone.

Just as angels were the first to deliver the message that Jesus had come in his incarnation, so angels are once again present here and are the first to deliver the news that Jesus had risen.

And in a mild rebuke, they informed the women that Jesus isn't in the tomb anymore. He is alive, just as he said, just as the scriptures predicted, prophesied.

[27 : 01] Human beings aren't great at predicting things. I'm sure that maybe some of you like me filled out a bracket for March Madness.

And every March, I am reminded of how bad of a predictor I am. Our knowledge is limited. But God's knowledge is infinite.

God has declared the end from the beginning. Throughout all the Hebrew scriptures, the Old Testament, the promise of the Messiah was clearly given again and again.

From Genesis to Malachi, there are over 300 specific prophecies that detail the coming, the dying, and the rising again of God's anointed one.

And Jesus is the only person who has ever walked this earth and fulfilled them all. Jesus continually pointed people to the scriptures and to his fulfillment of them.

[28 : 05] To the Pharisees who consistently opposed him and rejected him, Jesus said in John 5, 39 through 40, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

And it is they that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. On another occasion, when they questioned him, Jesus said in John 2, 18 through 19, what sign, they asked him, do you show us for doing these things?

And Jesus answered them, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. Again, we know he was talking about himself. In another instance, he said in Matthew 12, 40, for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

To his disciples, he said in Mark 9, 31, the son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him. And when he is killed after three days, he will rise.

These are just a few of the 21 times, the 21 references Jesus made about three days in the gospels and his rising again on that third day.

[29 : 23] The angels were pointing the women back to the words that Jesus spoke. The great truth here then for us is the significance of the resurrection and how it is inseparable from Jesus' prophetic words about his death and about his resurrection.

It is the word of God that shines forth, causing the fog of despair and perplexity in our lives to dissipate. If you continue on reading the rest of this chapter, Luke 24, you'll find a rhythm to this reality.

First, it's the women's encounter with the angels at the empty tomb, which we've read, verses 1 through 12. Second, it's the encounter between Jesus, now resurrected with some of his followers on the road to Emmaus, verses 13 through 35.

And third, we see Jesus' appearance to his disciples in Jerusalem, verses 36 through 49. And all three episodes are structured in the same way.

There's perplexity, there's a rebuke, then there's instruction, and the result is witness. In all three of those episodes, you will find that the instruction consists of this phrase, remember God's word.

[30 : 41] to truly understand how the resurrection provides hope in times of despair. You must read, you must devour, you must saturate your minds with God's words and remember it.

Many people have made predictions about the end of the world. Our culture is fascinated by apocalyptic stories of a dystopian future.

In our hearts, we know that there is an end coming. But in Christ, we know that that end is overseen by God and it will usher in a new, eternal beginning.

Uncontaminated by sin, unaffected by death. So we look back at 1 Corinthians 15 and the Apostle Paul addresses those who have denied and were perplexed by the resurrection, talking about them or telling them what all it entails.

He says to them, I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

[31 : 50] Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we all shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed.

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable. And this mortal body must put on immortality. Then when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

Oh death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ were predicted centuries before it took place.

Jesus came knowing what awaited him. And he bore the shame of it all. Your shame. My shame.

[33 : 01] Knowing what it would accomplish and the salvation it would bring to you. Jesus died as the suffering servant.

The scriptures depict him as the Lamb of God who was sacrificed to atone for our sins. But the scriptures also predict him as a lion, a warrior, a conqueror, a conquering king who has slain our greatest foes.

Remembering who Jesus is and remembering what Jesus has done gives courage for today and it gives hope for tomorrow. In Jesus Christ the deepest longing of the human heart is satisfied.

In Jesus Christ the despair we feel, the despair we see in the world that we live in are overcome.

In Jesus Christ there is always reason to hope because there is no power, there is no force that is capable of defeating or even disrupting his sovereign will.

[34 : 21] If you are despairing this morning, if you are perplexed by life this morning, the Lord says to you as his angelic messenger said to those women on that first Easter day, why are you seeking the living among the dead?

Jesus has risen and he is telling you to remember his word. And that is what these women did.

It says and they remembered his word. So we had a perplexing scene, a predicted outcome and now finally the third fact, a personal reality.

A personal reality. Verse 9 through 11. And returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven, that's the disciples, and to all the rest.

Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles but these words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them.

[35 : 28] The disciples would soon see Jesus resurrected. They would touch the scars, the places where the nails had pierced his flesh, but at this point they did not believe and they chalked it up to these women, well, they're just acting hysterical.

They saw something or got scared and it wasn't really what they thought. Maybe that's your reaction today. You've heard all this talk but it but it just seems either too good to believe or too exceptional to be true.

I challenge you. I challenge you to search and to seek and to evaluate what you think you know. I encourage you to be honest with yourself.

don't you want to live? Don't you want to have eternal life? Don't you desire peace?

Do you not see something wrong with yourself? Do you not perceive all the things that are wrong in this world?

[36 : 47] and do you not in those moments think to yourself it shouldn't be this way? You think those things and you know those things because you're not an animal.

You're not a highly evolved animal. You're not the product of some random chance events. You are a creature created in God's image.

You are a being with a conscience with an intellect and with an eternal soul. You have been made in God's image and only he can undo the despair that you feel by trusting in Jesus Christ.

The only one who is capable of filling that God sized soul in your heart. But perhaps today you are more like Peter as we encounter him in verse 12.

Let me read that again. But Peter rose and he ran to the tomb stooping and looking in he saw the linen cloths by themselves and he went home marveling at what had happened.

[38 : 06] Why did Peter react the way that he did? He didn't walk there. He didn't jog there. He ran there. Remember, Peter had just denied, recently denied, knowing Jesus.

He had vehemently denied any kind of association with Jesus and he did that three times just as Jesus said that he would do.

And in that moment as the rooster crowed, their eyes locked. Peter went away weeping for what he had done.

Imagine his heartache. Imagine his regret. Imagine his guilt. He rejected Jesus.

He rejected his best friend, his Lord. Not just once, twice, but three times.

[39 : 14] Imagine his agony. I think Peter desired a do-over. I think Peter wished he could press the reset button.

He knew if the grave was empty in this moment that maybe he had a second chance so he runs to the tomb to see for himself and he gets there and he sees it's empty.

He wasn't sure in that moment if Jesus had risen but I imagine that in that moment in his heart in his mind in his soul there was a flicker of hope maybe maybe what they said is true later Peter would see Jesus and they'd have a conversation and that conversation would end with Peter being forgiven by Jesus Jesus restoring him and Jesus setting him out on a task that would forever change his life and that has forever changed this world he preached as a bold witness to the gospel the reality that Jesus saves as evidenced by his sinless life as evidenced by his sacrificial death and proven by his victorious resurrection friend that can be you today

Jesus is still in the business of bringing dead things back to life he is still in the business of forgiving sinners who have rejected him time and time again he is still in the business of giving eternal life abundant!

life that satisfies the deepest longings of our hearts and provides us with an eternal hope not just in times of despair but at all times this is a personal reality that is available to you if you repent of your sins and if you turn to Jesus Christ in faith!

[42 : 16] ! the question he asked you today do!

you believe this? The resurrection is foundational to who we are as God's people as Christians though the day is gloomy though the storms of life rage all around and Christ who laid down his life and took it back up again on the third day you can stand brother you can stand sister know Jesus and live do you believe this?

I do I hope you do too Jesus resurrection provides hope in times of despair believe be encouraged Jesus Christ is risen he reigns and he will return he gives life he gives hope for today hope for tomorrow he gives us hope forever know Jesus and live let's pray Lord we thank you for your love for your grace for your mercy for your forgiveness Lord we thank you for your willingness to come

humble yourself at a human nature to your divine nature to suffer in our place on the cross to endure the father's wrath for the sins that we've committed to atone completely for us there until you cried and declared that it is finished

Lord we thank you for the amazing truth that that certainly was not the end of the story but on the third day you rose again God I pray for those who are here today they are not seeking the living among the dead God I pray that in their perplexity in their despair that they've heard your word and you will clear that up in your grace that you will call them to yourself that you will save them and give them the satisfaction that you've made all the rest of us whom you've saved to be able to taste now and know that we'll experience forever God we thank you for the hope that we have eternally in Jesus Christ Lord I pray that we would know you more and more and that we would live lives for you that are more bold and more courageous because Christ has risen he has risen indeed in Jesus name we pray amen