

Resurrection Sunday – HOPE is Here – Believe It!

4/21/19 – Pastor Randy

Luke 24:1-12 (NLT)

But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.

Luke 23 ends with darkness and hopelessness. Jesus has been crucified. Luke tells us that the whole crowd that came to see the crucifixion went home in deep sorrow and Jesus' closest followers stood at a distance watching while his body was removed from the cross and they followed as it was taken to the tomb for burial.

Luke 24 begins the same but gradually the darkness of disappointment and despair turns into the light of hope. Resurrection Sunday morning begins with some female followers of Jesus returning to the tomb only to find the stone moved away and the tomb empty. Luke tells us they were puzzled; they were at a complete loss as to what to make of the situation. They don't conclude he has risen. Only after an encounter with two angels telling them Jesus had risen just as Jesus had predicted in their hearing, did they even consider that as a possibility. They rushed back and told the 11 remaining disciples what they had just experienced. The response of the 11? They considered the women to be spouting nonsense so they refused to believe the report. But Peter was curious. He ran to the tomb, found it empty like

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the women said, but he didn't embrace their report about a resurrection. He just went away wondering what happened. Luke goes on to recount a story about an encounter between Jesus and two other disciples who had also heard this report from the women. When Jesus first approached them, they didn't recognize him and they began telling him what had happened. Luke describes them as being full of gloom as they spoke of their hope that Jesus was the Messiah who would deliver Israel, but now, three days later, that hope is dead. The women's story about Jesus being risen left them astonished, not convinced; it was incredible, not credible to them. Jesus scolded them for being "slow of heart to believe" and then as he continued to speak to them all of a sudden they realized that it was Jesus.

They rushed back to tell the other disciples that they now had confirmation that the women's story was true because they had now seen him and talked to him. While they were reporting this Jesus came into the place where they were gathered and revealed himself to them and their response was fear like they were seeing a ghost. Jesus response was, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? He then proceeded to let them touch him and he ate with them so they knew it was really him.

The resurrection of Jesus is the central claim upon which Christianity stands or falls as a religion to be believed and followed. Paul wrote that if Jesus did not rise our faith would be in vain.

There are many reasons to believe in the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection. The reality of the resurrection provides the best explanation for the historical realities that surround its occurrence as well as the historical realities that sprang from it. On our website you will find, along with the notes from this message, the notes from last year's Easter message in which I reviewed the reasons that compel belief in the resurrection. I have done that for those who have sincere doubts but are open to answers to those doubts. The evidence that supports the resurrection as a historic reality is readily available.

Today I am not going to defend the resurrection but focus our attention on the hope that results from a belief in Jesus' resurrection. But before I do that, I

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want to say something about the nature of belief; something we often fail to recognize that Luke 24 brings to light.

Believing in Jesus involves an act of the will. The question is not, “Can you believe it”, but “Will you believe it? Jesus never asked, “Can you believe in me?” He assumed they could. He asked if they would! If you wait until you have no more doubts, no more questions, no more fears, you will never believe.

The disciples were not inclined to belief. They were inclined toward disbelief. They did not possess what sociologists refer to as the plausibility structures to accept the fact of Jesus’ resurrection. In other words, their experiences and their understanding of the world did not permit them to consider the report of Jesus’ resurrection to be a possibility. That is why Luke tells us the report “sounded like nonsense” to the disciples, Peter was left “wondering what happened”, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were still sad and disappointment even after hearing the report, and even when Jesus was standing right in front of them they were simultaneously filled with joy and wonder...and disbelief!! Luke describes them as being unwilling to believe and Jesus said they were “slow of heart” to believe.

It isn’t until the final verses in Luke 24 that the disciples have come to a place of being utterly convinced about the resurrection and completely relieved of their perplexity and astonishment. This takes place after Jesus ascended. As I read the story I have to wonder whether Jesus decision to remain with the disciples for 40 days after his resurrection was to provide sufficient time for them to really grasp, understand, and believe what they had been witnessing.

The disciples wouldn't trust the report of the resurrection at first. Even after they saw Jesus, they still were wondering if they were seeing what they thought they thought they were seeing! Now eventually, the physical evidence became overwhelmingly compelling, so much so that they were willing to die for that belief. Some say Christian belief is a crutch that makes life easier. Not for these first Christians. It was a cross, not a crutch.

“But we don’t have that physical evidence”, some say. Jesus told Thomas that it was good that he believed once he saw and touched Jesus but he said those who believe without this physical evidence are even more blessed.

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4/21/19 – Pastor Randy

Some people believe say they can't believe the resurrection but then I discover that the only arguments they listen to or read are those of non-believers. Don't tell me you can't believe if you've only listened to Bill Maher, and you've only read Bart Erhman, Richard Dawkins, or Sam Harris.

If a Dr. examines you and diagnoses you with a serious disease and then prescribes a risky treatment, but one which he/she believes has a high cure rate, you have to make a choice. You need to decide if you will trust the Dr.'s prescribed treatment. Sixers fans have been told for years to "trust the process". For the first couple the call to trust did not come easy. This Sixer's front office slogan has now become a pop-culture mantra. The meaning behind the phrase is this: We believe if we pursue this course the result will be positive. We can't prove it will be, but we our confidence that it will motivates us to pursue a course of belief-based action.

Faith in Christ and Christianity is a lot like that with the additional fact that God the Holy Spirit is working in our minds and hearts to strengthen and sustain that faith. The Christian is one who has chosen to pursue a course of action based on his/her trust in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the validation and vindication of everything Jesus said and did.

**What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection? Why does it matter?
What difference does it make?**

The resurrection of Jesus was the basis for the Christians hope. Hope is one of several words that could be used to characterize the message of Christianity. The NT Christians were a community of people full of hope. Hope pervades the narrative sections in Acts and the teachings in the epistles.

A. A Future, Eternal HOPE

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by

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4/21/19 – Pastor Randy

various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1. The HOPE of being in God's presence for eternity. "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." In Philippians Paul wrote, "There's a part of me that wants the death sentence because I get to go be with Jesus!"
2. The HOPE of the new creation. The resurrection of Christ carries with it the promise of a future resurrection for those that are in Christ but have died. It also carries with it the promise of a completely redeemed and renewed created order which includes new bodies for us.
Romans 8:20-21: But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.
Romans 8:23: ...we wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.
3. The HOPE of glory. The Hope of being perfected spiritually. (Glorification) Paul wrote in *Col. 1:27* that our union with Christ carries with it the hope of glory. The Christian doctrine of glorification deserves a whole message but simply put, it is the revelation that at the consummation of the new creation we will be perfected. We will share in God's glory without robbing him of his! Consider this stunning statement by John: "When he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

The resurrection provides hope for the future and hope right now!

1. HOPE in EVERY TRIAL

God is working even in your darkest places of our lives. At noon until 3 pm darkness covered the land in conjunction with the time of Jesus death. This physical darkness magnified the emotional "darkness" felt by Jesus followers. This was the worst moment of their lives. All hope was gone!!! So it seemed. But it wasn't! The resurrection reveals the providence of God. He was providing for our salvation and breaking the curse of sin over creation even when from all appearances, sin had won. The resurrection reveals what was

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4/21/19 – Pastor Randy

truly happening on Good Friday; while it seemed like sin was killing Jesus, Jesus was killing sin. You might be in a dark place now. You might go through a dark place in the future. The resurrection assures us that our God is at work, turning darkness into light, death into life, defeat into victory!

2. HOPE for GRACE and MERCY

Because of the resurrection we have assurance that God's mercy and grace are available to meet us in the darkest moments of our lives. The resurrection validated and vindicated Jesus as the once for all-time sacrifice for sin. Paul said that without the resurrection, the promise of forgiveness is a farce!

I am thinking of a pastor I know who had an affair. He was crushed under the weight of his unfaithfulness to his wife. But God has restored the love and joy of their marriage.

One of my favorite songs is titled "So Will I". Towards the end of the song we hear: *"God of salvation, You chased down my heart, through all of my failure and pride. On a hill You created, the light of the world, abandoned in darkness to die. And as You speak a hundred billion failures disappear."* You will be perfected in eternity but the resurrection gives us hope that God's grace will meet us here.

3. HOPE for TRANSFORMATION

Romans 6:4 says, *"And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives."*

Jesus resurrection is the validation and culmination of Jesus' victory over sin; a victory which we are enabled to actually experience through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Jesus' resurrection means that we can begin now to live as God's workmanship, re-created for good works. (Eph. 2:8-10)

There is hope for freedom from addiction, there is hope for restored marriages, there is hope for renewed purpose, there is hope to be freed from bitterness and hatred. You might have made a mess of your life but God takes the ugly pictures that we have painted of our life and He begins to paint a new picture, a picture of a life that reflects the beauty and goodness of the most beautiful, glorious God of creation.

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