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Easter; Resurrection; Hope / Acts 2:22–36

Reading 1: Luke 23:33–37; 24:1–12

Reading 2: Luke 24:36–53

Introduction

Introduction Proper

The sand at the beach was centuries old, but it could hardly have witnessed a darker moment. The weather was bright and still. It formed a contrast with men dressed in black from head to toe, coldly striding through the sand. Each one was propelling ahead of them a man dressed in orange. There were 21.

You see, in 2015 ISIS captured these 21 Christian construction workers in Libya. They tortured them for weeks, trying to get them to deny their faith in Jesus. They would not budge. So ISIS executed them on that beach.

I watched an interview with their wives. Their martyred husbands had moved from Egypt to Libya to find work, so they could send money back to their families. What a hopeless situation these ladies were left in! Many of them had begged their husbands not to go. They were abandoned as widows, they lived in poor communities, they were left to raise their children alone.

Where should they find hope now?

Where do *we* find hope?

For some of us, we think if we just had a bit more income, a higher position at work, maybe we could afford a house, we could have a better lifestyle, and *then* we would be happy! But if these widows had hoped in the money their husbands sent home, that hope was now shattered.

If they thought that following their heart and fulfilling their dreams would give them hope, that seems like a distant dream now - all they can do is work hard to provide for their children.

If their hope was in their family and relationships, they now they now realise that the ones we dearly love can be here one moment and gone the next.

When life gets dark around us, where do we find hope? *Solid* hope? Hope that keeps us going, hope that is solid and reliable, hope that no-one take away, that won't be crushed in a moment?

I'm going to risk sounding naïve or over-confident here - but I want to show you that *Jesus* is the only one who can give hope in the darkness.

To be more specific, Jesus' resurrection from the dead gives us real hope. This is not just blindly wishing or using religion as a crutch. Rather, it is an assurance about our future based in reality. Jesus' resurrection provides *true* hope.

Jesus' Resurrection Validates His Identity

State the Point

So I said before that the resurrection of Jesus gives us true *hope*. But what do I mean by that?

Well, there's three parts to it. The first part is this: Jesus' resurrection validates his identity. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we know he is who he said he is!

Show from the Bible/Explain

But who did Jesus say he is? Well, let's turn our first reading today in [Luke 24](#). Remember that some of the women who followed Jesus came to the tomb on the Sunday morning after he was crucified. The angels meet them there, saying:

Luke 24:6-7 NIV

⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' "

Jesus claimed to be the Son of Man. What does that mean? Well, centuries earlier, the prophet Daniel had spoken of this "son of man". Daniel prophesied that he would be a human, but also that he would enter the throne-room of God himself, and he would be given power and authority over every part of the universe forever. All "peoples, nations, and languages" would serve and worship him, and Daniel associates him directly with the Most High God.

In John's Gospel, Jesus claimed that he and the Father are one! And by "Father", he means God himself. Jesus claimed to be God, come to earth as a human! That's quite the claim. If its not true its utterly blasphemous.

So is it true?

Well, think about what the angels say after they call Jesus the Son of Man. They remind the women how Jesus himself predicted he would be arrested, then killed, then resurrected. Now, plenty of people make grandiose claims about themselves, but they are often proved wrong, aren't they?

But not with Jesus - in our last reading, we saw that Jesus himself entered the room with Jesus' disciples. They saw him face to face, they gave him fish to eat, they listened to him teach them. The prediction came true! Jesus' resurrection validates who he says he is!

Illustrate

You see, hundreds of Jesus' earliest disciples were persecuted and even killed for their faith.

Now, many people from all different faiths and religions will die for their faith. ISIS is an extremist group - their views don't represent most Muslims around the world. But, they are prepared to die for their faith. Now they believe *different* things than Jesus' disciples, don't they? That's why they killed those 21 Christians in Egypt. So who's right? They can't both be right!!

Well those 21 Christian martyrs and the ISIS militants who killed them have something in common. None of them were alive when the major events of their faith happened! They never saw Jesus OR Muhammed! They *believe* in them, but they didn't *see* them in person. They could just be mistaken.

That's what's incredible about Jesus' disciples in the first century. They *knew* whether what they believed was true or or a lie. They had *seen* Jesus and lived with him. Hundreds of them claimed to have interacted with the resurrected Jesus, and not just once - on multiple occasions!

And what did they gain from this? They only got persecution and death. If they were lying, why would they die for it? They would just back down.

No, their testimony is strong evidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead.

The most logical conclusion then is that God raised Jesus from the dead, and the resurrection *proves* that Jesus is who he says he is - God in the flesh. Jesus' resurrection validates his identity: He is God's special son, Immanuel, **God with us**.

That means God himself has reached out to humanity to give us hope.

Apply

If up til now you *haven't* believed these things about Jesus, I encourage you: do your research! Look into it, study it out! If Jesus really rose from the grave, surely you'd want to know about it! You can have hope that God himself came to earth on a rescue mission.

St George's has a regular course called Taste and See, where you get to enjoy four meals, ask your questions, and look in more detail at what Christianity is all about. Just mark on your card that you're interested and put it in the letterbox, or come speak to me after.

For those here that *already* believe in Jesus, I want to encourage you - *live like Jesus is alive*. The Son of Man really rose from the dead, and now he has authority over everything. This is a historical fact, not a myth or just a nice idea.

That has to change our lives, doesn't it? Let that truth sink deep down, let it give you assurance, let it drive you to worship, let it give you hope.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and that validates his identity.

Jesus' Resurrection Proclaims His Exaltation

State the Point

There is a second way Jesus' resurrection gives us hope: It proclaims his exaltation. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we know God has lifted him up to the place of highest honour, to supreme authority over the entire universe.

Show from the Bible

Let's look at Acts chapter 2 for a moment. Acts was also written by Luke by the way, so its like Luke part 2. Now from v14 onwards, Jesus' disciple Peter gets up and starts preaching to a crowd. And from v32 onwards he says:

Acts 2:32–36 NIV

³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.

³³ Exalted to the right hand of God [and skipping to v36]

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

Do you hear what he's saying there? Peter says that Jesus was resurrected and *therefore* we know he is Lord. The resurrection is the *proof* that Jesus is now ruler over all. There is nothing *outside* of Jesus' authority. He is enthroned in heaven with God almighty!

Explain

See if the resurrection didn't happen, Christ would not be exalted above everything else. Otherwise, you're exalting a dead man, a failed man, a nothing! If the resurrection didn't happen, then Jesus is just another crazy guy who thought he was the messiah - and there had already been many of those!

The Jews who killed him certainly thought that's what he was! The Roman authorities who crucified him thought the same!

But because we know the resurrection *did* happen, Paul says that we *also* know God has made Jesus the boss of everything.

Illustrate

Back when I was a grad engineer, I remember working under Troy, the head of the hardware team. He was a calm, quiet, gentle guy, you might not have guessed he was the team lead.

Well in one meeting, several engineers started complaining about taking our electronic system through all the shock and vibration testing. They thought it wasn't worth doing, that it would be a waste of time because we were still refining the design.

I was pretty sure we were going to cancel the testing.

But then Troy used his boss voice, you know? I'd never heard it before. He wasn't rude or angry, but he got real stern, real firm, and said "No we're doing the testing. Brad you're going to handle this. John you're going to deal with that." And all the other engineers went quiet and just listened, and they did what he said.

I did a double-take - I'd never seen *that* Troy before!

You see everyone knew in *theory* Troy was the boss, but then he *showed* us that he was the boss.

And that's what Jesus' resurrection does for us. It *shows* us that Jesus is not just a silent sufferer - he is now enthroned as Lord of the universe.

Apply

What does that mean for us? Well, it means that our future depends on how we respond to Jesus.

If we reject him or ignore him, remember he is not just a Jewish man who lived 2000 years ago. His closest followers unanimously taught that he's the one who has authority over *everything* - including our future. Those who disregard Jesus should not expect a good future. Anyone who refuses to worship and obey him should expect God's punishment, forever.

But do you understand why Jesus came? He came because all of humanity already *has* rebelled against him - he's God, remember! We are all under his judgment. If we don't think you've rebelled against him, just read what Jesus taught. It won't take long to see it.

Jesus came to *forgive*. In fact, he *died* to forgive us. We deserved God's punishment, but on that cross as a human he put himself under the unrelenting torrent of God's judgment on humanity.

God poured out all his anger at our rebellion onto Jesus, who willingly chose to endure it. Jesus went through the torment of the cross so that whoever believes in him can be reconciled to God, at peace with God.

If we turn away from our rebellion and choose to follow Jesus, he will show us nothing but kindness. In his grace he will wash away every stain on your past. He forgives even the worst of sinners. What a great hope!

When someone believes in Jesus, the Bible says they are then enthroned *with* Christ in the heavenly places. Followers of Jesus have an advocate in the highest heaven! Who can truly come against us and succeed?

If Satan, our enemies, or anyone else tries to kick us out of heaven, they're going to have to answer to HIM!

What an amazing hope!

Jesus' Resurrection Guarantees Our Future

State the Point

Thirdly, I want to show you that Jesus' resurrection guarantees our future. Because Jesus rose from the dead, whoever believes in him has a bright future ahead.

Show from the Bible/Explain

Let's go back to our second reading, [Luke 24](#). When Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, they thought they were seeing a ghost! Look at what Jesus says to them in verses 38-39:

Luke 24:38–39 NIV

...“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

They had seen Jesus die, you see, and they knew that dying is very different from sleeping. When you go to sleep, you always wake up in the morning - even if you *feel* like you're dead! But when you're actually dead, you don't wake up!

So when they suddenly saw Jesus standing in the middle of the room, they were terrified! They thought he was a ghost. But he wasn't a ghost. Do you know why? Because he wasn't DEAD anymore! He was alive! He proved it by eating some fish - ghosts can't eat because they don't have bodies.

He was really alive! They had been so sad after he died, but now he's back!

He had the same body - he still had the scars from his crucifixion. Nails had pierced his wrists, and the scars were etched there for all to see.

But Jesus also ate. He was now completely healthy. Not just that, he could suddenly appear into a room, even though the disciples had locked the door!

It was the same body, but it was also *different*. Better. It was a body that couldn't die again, a body that would live *forever*.

In [Romans 6:5](#), the Bible says, "...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.

All believers will die, but they will also be raised to life, just like Jesus was! We will be resurrected in our bodies! But here's the cool part. Even though *this* body will be raised, it will also be different. It will be like Ryan Graetz 2.0.

Our bodies will be better, upgraded! No longer riddled by pain, disease, chronic fatigue, migraines, injury, and disability. Mental, emotional, and physical trauma and damage from our past will no longer plague us.

But best of all, there will be no more death. Death has always been humanity's greatest enemy. We have a 100% death rate! No-one escapes!

But because Jesus himself rose from the dead, death is beaten, gone forever. When we are resurrected like Christ was resurrected, we won't run out of time to do all the things we love. We won't worry about getting older, frailer, sicker. We will live forever with Jesus himself.

Now THAT is hope.

Apply

For anyone here carrying grief, perhaps you've lost someone - the resurrection means death did not get the last word. For those who trust in Christ, there is a real reunion ahead. Not some vague spiritual idea. Real bodies, real embrace.

For anyone whose body is failing them, or whose mind is heavy, or who's just worn out from carrying it all - there is comfort in knowing that this body is not the final version. Everything that's broken will be made whole.

For anyone afraid of what's coming, know this: Jesus has already been through death and come back. He's not sending his people somewhere he hasn't been.

Conclusion

Listen, money can't buy you true hope. Career can't win you true hope. Families and relationships divide and break up, and other humans will always fail you! And one day, you will die. This world is full of darkness, and it is easy for the darkness to overcome us.

What about the wives of those 21 Christians martyrs? Did they have any hope? Let me read you what they said.

Mariam, Sameh Salah's wife said:

I'm thanking God...I'm not sad at all. I knew my Christianity, because my husband died as a martyr; he didn't have an accident...Farewell is hard and it will remain hard to the end of my life. But I am not sad...God wanted them to be with Him in Heaven...God never abandons anyone. (Christian Youth Channel 2015b)

Ezzat Boshra Nassif's wife said:

...How lucky you are...when your daughter grew up, she would be so proud of you, Ezzat. They [ISIS] will regret and cry for all these sins that they committed...I forgive them, I don't hate them. We thank God who will never abandon us. (Christian Youth Channel 2015a)

How could these women say such mind-boggling things?

They had true hope.

The darkness did not overcome them, because their hope is in the resurrected Jesus.

Jesus' resurrection validates his identity. It proves to us that Jesus not just a religious teacher, he's not a false prophet - he is God in human form - solid, provable, flesh and blood. We have hope because we can *know God* through Jesus.

Jesus' resurrection proclaims his exaltation. It shows that God exalted him to the place of highest authority - he's the boss of everyone! So we have hope, because he is our great friend in high places!

Jesus' resurrection guarantees our future. Because he rose from the dead, those who believe and follow him will rise too one day - in new, healthy, indestructible bodies! Death, our biggest enemy, was beaten on that precious Sunday 2000 years ago!

I trust you can now see where true, rock-solid hope is found. I thank God for resurrecting Christ because it proves to me this vital, life-giving truth: Jesus is our hope in the darkness. Let's not trust in earthly things that fade, break, and perish - let's put our trust in Christ, our living and indestructible hope.

God bless you all, and everyone is welcome to stay after the gathering for some tea and coffee in the foyer. Happy Easter!

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