

Resurrection Hope

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[0 : 0 0] And he had a short period of time. He had clearly spent some time teaching them the fundamentals of the faith. And so he taught them this one thing that theologians call the parousia, the second coming of Jesus.

The parousia means the arrival. So he taught them about the second coming. He taught them the gospel. He taught them that forgiveness of sin comes through faith in Jesus Christ and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And then he told them, well, Jesus is going to come back again. Then he had to leave because there was persecution in the city. And so he has to hightail it out of there after just a short period of time with these Christians.

It doesn't matter for the Thessalonians because they're ecstatic about this newfound faith that they have. They're incredibly excited about this truth they've been taught, this good news that they've received and believed.

But then some of them start to die. And they're like, hang on, what's going on here? How does this work with our newfound faith, with all the things, Paul, that you've taught us?

[0 : 5 6] And so this greatly concerned them. Evidently, they had assumed that when Paul said Jesus is going to come back again, all the Christians were going to be around and alive for Jesus' appearing.

But now, Auntie Margaret, she died of old age over there. Jim was run over by a chariot, a Roman chariot. And so now they're going to be like, what do we do with this? What do we do with people dying?

What's going to happen to them when Jesus comes back again? And so that's the question that Paul tackles here, the big question.

And here's his basic answer to their question. His answer is this. Those who die in Christ, in other words, Christians who die trusting in the resurrected Jesus, will one day themselves be resurrected when the Lord returns.

That's what he says. And so here's what I want you to see from these, particularly the first two verses there. Number one, the grounds of hope. And number two, the need for hope. The grounds of hope and the need for hope.

[1 : 5 4] Have a look at verse 13. Paul starts and says, Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope.

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. Paul grounds the hope of the second coming in the objective reality of Jesus' resurrection.

So, for him, how do we know that the dead will rise at Christ's second coming? Well, verse 14. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring back the dead in Christ when Jesus returns.

So, for Paul, there's actual substance to his hope. There's a reason why he has this particular hope. You see, because often we will say things like, I hope things are going to turn out all right.

Now, what that is, is it's speculation. It's wishful thinking. When you say, I hope the weather is going to be good for a bri this weekend, or I hope the economy is going to get better, or I hope Arsenal is going to win the Champions League.

[3 : 0 8] When you say those things, what you're saying is, I hope for all of those things. I wish for all of those things to be true, especially the last one.

I wish for all of those things to be true. Now, that's not the type of hope that Paul is speaking about here. The reason that our hope as Christians is not speculative, the reason our hope is not just wishful thinking, like, well, I hope it turns out all right, is because it's grounded in objective historical fact.

And that is that Jesus rose from the dead. So, let's talk about that for a moment, because this is absolutely crucial to the idea of Christian hope, and maybe it's something you've never thought about, or maybe it's something that you're a little bit skeptical of.

Jesus rose from the dead. That is the consistent eyewitness testimony that we have in the early accounts of the New Testament. So, let me remind you of what the Apostle Paul actually writes in another place in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 15, verse 3 to 8. He says, What I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, that He appeared to Cephas, that's to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

[4 : 28] After that, He appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Now, what He's doing there, He's basically just rolling out a list of eyewitnesses. In fact, more than 500 eyewitnesses there in that particular section, and He's essentially saying to His readers, Go and check up on this story.

This is one of the earliest letters written in the New Testament, so it's not long after the fact. He says, Go check up on this story. These people are still alive. They saw the resurrected Jesus. Don't just take my word for it.

Go and ask them. Go meet these people. Go talk to them. The evidence, and we obviously don't have time to go into all of this, because it's rather technical. We did a talk on this just over a week ago now, on Friday night at Hope City Church, but the evidence of the eyewitness testimony regarding the resurrection of the New Testament is so strong that Gert Ludemann, who is an extremely critical German New Testament scholar and historian, who does not himself believe in the resurrection, he concedes this.

He says this. This is a guy who spends a lot of time debating Orthodox Christians about the resurrection, but he himself concedes this. He says, It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ.

[6 : 02] So secular, unbelieving historians believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the early Christians saw something.

They saw something. And so in order to make sense of that seeing something, and all the other historical evidence we have around that, they created all sorts of theories to try and argue the resurrection away.

And you kind of have to do that. They have to do that because they have a pre-commitment to the idea that miracles don't happen. So if miracles don't happen, well then you've got to have something else to fill in the gap for all the evidence that we have.

You have to come up with alternative theories to make sense of why we have so many independent eyewitness accounts of this occasion. So they come up with things like the conspiracy theory that these early Christians conspired to make up the story of the resurrected Jesus and then sort of pass it on to each other.

That theory doesn't work particularly well though because many of those same early Christians went to their death, were put to death on the basis of their testimony that Jesus rose from the dead.

[7 : 11] Now listen, it's one thing for a person to die for a belief that they hold very dearly but which they themselves cannot verify. That happens in all sorts of religions today, even for non-religious ideologies.

But it's a completely different thing for someone to die for something they know they had made up. And in the first century, in the second century, well the first century when the eyewitnesses are alive, nobody breaks rank.

Nobody, as the executioner is coming closer, sharpening his blade, says, okay, hang on, hang on, hang on, hang on. This is all a bit too real right now.

Let me come clean. We actually made this whole thing up. You would think at least one of them would have done that if they'd made it up? So the conspiracy theory just doesn't account for the numerous eyewitnesses.

Then there's one that's quite popular today, that is the hallucination theory. They must have all had a hallucination and that's where the stories come from. So they really believed that they saw the risen Lord but sadly they were mistaken.

[8 : 25] It was an hallucination. That theory though doesn't work really well either because one of the reasons that theory doesn't work is because there really isn't much in the way of psychological research that documents mass hallucinations.

And that's really important. It just does not seem to happen as a phenomenon. In academic literature on the subject, there aren't documented examples of mass hallucination events like the likes of which we find in the New Testament, in the Bible.

In the New Testament, we have multiple appearances to different people and the majority of those appearances are to groups of people.

So for the mass hallucination theory to hold, somehow, these groups of eyewitnesses on multiple different occasions all had to have the same hallucinations.

Now it's even crazier if you do actual research and you discover that in terms of grief, hallucinations that come out of grief, it's something like five to seven percent of people who undergo enormous grief might have a hallucination as an individual.

[9 : 40] So then, you've got to have all five to seven percent of people all in a group all having the same hallucination at the same time in multiple different locations and then write about that in different independent documents from each other.

It starts to get a little bit crazy. You've got to do all sorts of gymnastics with the psychological data to make that one stick. There are even, we don't have time for this, but there are even other wilder theories out there that are actually postulated by credentialed academics like that Jesus had an identical twin brother and so Jesus died and then voila, the twin brother who we'd never heard about ever before, he appears and he starts walking around and starts teaching and preaching. That's a legit theory that has been put in print to try and explain. So strong is the evidence that people would have to come up with a theory like that in the first place. Different secular theories have been coming out since the first century.

None of them really stick because they all have massive holes in them. Today, in the academy among critical scholars who study the resurrection but who don't believe it to have happened, there really isn't a dominant alternative theory.

In fact, most scholars today that you come across will say, we actually just don't know what happened but it couldn't have been resurrection because we don't believe miracles happened.

There's no single alternative theory that comes close, even close to accounting for all of the historical eyewitness accounts that we have in the New Testament like the resurrection does.

[11 : 16] And so, if you then, and this has got nothing to do with history, this is purely kind of philosophical, this is sort of worldview stuff, but if you will allow the possibility for miracles, then the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to numerous groups of people over a period of 40 days just makes so, so much more sense of the data than anything else some of the brightest minds in the field of history have been able to come up with.

And so, brothers and sisters in Christ, I think you can be incredibly confident this morning in your Christian hope because it is grounded in objective historical fact, the objective historical fact of Jesus' resurrection.

Now, why is the resurrection such a powerful hope for the Christian? I mean, you might say, sure, it's an incredible miracle, but why this miracle more so than all the other miracles that are in the Bible?

Why is this one so important for hope? And it's for this simple reason. There is nothing that robs us of hope more than the reality of death.

There's nothing that robs us of hope more than the reality of death. Here's the second thing, the need for hope. Let's go back to the issue that prompted Paul to write these lines in verse 13. He says there, brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope.

[12 : 52] So the issue is death. Death of their friends, death of their colleagues, death of their family members. Paul says, I don't want you to be uninformed about this reality and I don't want you

to be like the rest of humanity when they're confronted by this reality.

That is, they have no hope when they're confronted by this reality. Now friends, think about this. We use all sorts of things to distract ourselves from this overwhelming, looming reality, but death really, really is the biggest problem on the horizon of each of our lives.

I mean, you can wonder about all sorts of things that are gonna take place in the future. You can wonder if you're gonna get rich, you can wonder if you're gonna be successful, you can wonder if you're gonna get married or not be married, you can wonder if you're gonna have kids or not have kids, you can wonder if you're gonna own a home or not own a home, you can wonder about all sorts of things and we do think about those sorts of things all of the time.

But there's one thing you don't have to wonder about and that is the question, will I die one day? there's only one answer for each and every one of us it's the same answer it's the answer yes I will die one day and yet in general we don't like to think about that it's a bit of a downer to think about that it's the one concrete reality of our lives and yet we don't want to think about it why?

why? well because it is this horrific shadow that hangs over our very fragile existence the author of the book of Hebrews he describes us as actually being enslaved to the fear of death he says chapter 2 verse 15 of Hebrews not just enslaved to death itself and that we'll all die but actually enslaved to the fear of death that it hangs over us we live in slavery of that fear people who say that they don't fear death are liars and I think the longer you think about the reality the more terrifying it actually becomes now there have been some very smart people down the ages down the centuries who have reflected deeply on the subject of death and concluded that we actually don't have anything to worry about so the Epicureans in ancient Greece they realized that that really fear of death is our biggest problem so they were right in the money there the biggest because they looked at that and said well it's the biggest inhibitor to us truly living good and free lives and so they said we've got to come up with a way to remove this shadow this the scepter of death that hangs over us all the time they came up with an argument that's then been used with many many people since then and it goes something like this so Epicurus the founder of the Epicureans he stated it this way he said why fear death when we can never perceive it why fear death when we can never perceive it and what does he mean by that exactly well he used an illustration and he said think about life before you were born so you can do it all right now all of you you can think about life before you were born was it bad so then why will the ceasing of life be bad why will death be bad then the Roman Epicurean philosopher Lucretius he later pointed out the same thing that our state of presumed non-existence after death is the same as the state of non-existence that we had before our birth see so you don't really have to fear death you really don't have to fear the end of consciousness it's basically like having a really really long sleep and who doesn't have like to have a really really long sleep but I think there's one enormous emotional and existential problem with that that cold hard logic let me try and explain it this way

[17 : 02] Ralph Lewis is an atheistic psychologist and he's the author of a book called Finding Purpose in a Godless World and when confronted with this challenge of death and the fear of losing consciousness the fear of death he basically restates what the Epicureans have always said and he says this he says since death from a biological point of view entails a complete and utter extinguishing of our consciousness being dead will not feel like anything no more so than you felt say a year before you were born there simply will be no you to do the feeling now that's impeccable cold hard logic but the longer I read that particularly that last line the longer I read that last line the more horrific it sounded there simply will be no you to do the feeling you see the problem with the Epicureans the problem with Lucretius the problem with Ralph Lewis is that to move so quickly from non-existence before life to non-existence after life is to fail to deal with what's happened in the middle the fact that you and I well we have experienced life we've felt what it means to be alive we felt what it feels like to be alive we felt what it's like to live we felt what it's like to behold beauty we felt what it's like to engage in friendship we felt what it's like to be part of a family we felt what it's like to have a purpose and joy and hope we've had all of those feelings we've had all of those experiences and so when Ralph Lewis then comes along and he says there simply will be no you to do the feeling that I think is the statement of the deepest horror because it's a statement about our greatest loss our loss of everything our loss of ourselves and so I don't care if I won't feel my death when I'm dead because I won't be conscious to feel it

I feel it now because I know it's coming because I know there's a coming loss of me that's fear of death now no nonsense about eternal sleep is going to make me feel better about that or remove

that horror and so in a world without God without resurrection I read Ralph Lewis' logic and I actually come out feeling even more terrified of death and so I'm more than anyone maybe you're with me on this boat need something or someone to remove that terror of death now another ancient author not Epicurus not Lucretius but the apostle Paul tells me who that someone is his name is Jesus Christ and he tasted death in my place and rose again removing the power of death removing the fear of death verse 14 for we believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him in Jesus we have what the great theologian

John Owen called the death of death in the death of Christ by dying and rising again Jesus kills death there's a poem that I studied in high school maybe they still study it now maybe you studied it at some point it's the sonnet death be not proud by John Donne when you read that poem at sort of a surface level as you gloss over it it sounds like he's making a similar argument to Epicurus and others like that when he says he says the reason that death shouldn't be proud is because death is like sleep and who doesn't like sleep so the poem maybe you remember it maybe you can recite it from memory but it goes like this it says death be not proud though some have called thee mighty and dreadful for thou art not so for those whom thou thinkest thou dost overthrow die not poor death nor yet canst thou kill me from rest and sleep which but thy pictures be much pleasure then from thee much more must flow and soonest our best men with thee do go rest of their bones and souls delivery so you read that and it sounds a lot like Epicurus but then there's a significant twist at the end thou art slave to fate chance kings and desperate men and dust with poison war and sickness dwell and poppy or charms can make us sleep as well and better than thy stroke why swellst thou then one short sleep past we wake eternally and death shall be no more death thou shalt die see there's the difference one short sleep past we wake eternally now John

Dunn was not an Epicurean he was an Anglican minister who believed that in the death and resurrection of Christ death was beaten eternally and he was a man who was accustomed to death his father died when he was four years old five of his children died in childbirth his wife died in the prime of her life and he ministered in London during the plague where he was burying congregation members around him all of the time now we know a lot about his poems but some of his best writing is actually in his sermons the final sermon he preached just weeks before his own death is entitled Death's Duel and he closed the sermon by looking as any kind of good sermon should at the crucified yet risen Messiah as the solution to our deepest problems to our deepest struggles this is what he said he said there now hangs that sacred body upon the cross re-baptized in his own tears and sweat and embalmed in his own blood alive there are those bowels of compassion which are so conspicuous so manifested as that you may see them through his wounds there those glorious eyes grew faint in their sight so as the sun ashamed to survive them departed with his light too and then that son of God who was never from us and yet had now come a new way unto us in assuming our nature delivers that soul by a new way a voluntary emission of it into the father's hands and as God breathed the soul into the first Adam so the second Adam breathed his soul into God into the hands of God there we leave you Christian in that blessed dependency to hang upon him that hangs upon the cross there bathe in his tears there suck at his wounds and lie down in peace in his grave till he vouchsafed you a resurrection and an ascension into that kingdom which he hath prepared for you with the inestimable price of his incorruptible blood friends because in Jesus God became man because he stood in our place because he lived because he died and because he rose again for us we this morning can say with the utmost confidence one short sleep past we wake eternally and death shall be no more death thou shalt die you cannot get that hope anywhere else and to the extent that you are able to grasp that hope it will radically transform the way you live in the now even in the face of incredible suffering and difficulty that has been the testimony of

[25 : 36] Christians throughout the ages and so friends this morning I say rejoice in that hope if you're a believer in Jesus Christ and if you sit here and you say I don't know if I trust in Jesus cling to that hope run to it grab it take it with both hands because you don't get it anywhere else Jesus has risen that is our hope let's pray our father our savior fill us fill us with a sense of the resurrection hope this morning Lord today today we sit here and we sing these songs of victory we're reminded of the victory but tomorrow we go back into the harshness of the world tomorrow we carry these frail bodies back into struggles and difficulties and so I pray that we will walk into all of those situations carried by this resurrection hope knowing that our final resurrection is secure knowing that our final hope is secure because

Jesus is resurrected Lord clear our vision our vision gets so clouded we think about so many other things and they wrap us up in anxiety they cripple us they break us down and we don't see Jesus we don't see the resurrection it doesn't loom over us like it should instead death continues to loom over us and the things associated with death continue to loom over us and so we don't live stable confident lives we limp and we fall and we stumble we go backwards sometimes clear our vision of all that is false Lord and let us see Jesus clearly this morning Father I pray for any person who sits here and who doesn't know the love of Jesus who doesn't know that the resurrection hope can be their hope I pray that you would bring them from a place bring them to a place of repentance and faith this morning trusting in Jesus with all their might we ask for this in Christ's holy glorious wondrous name
Amen