

2. A Sure Hope

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[0 : 0 0] Now let's pray together. Apostle Peter writes, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 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, being guarded through faith, for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Our Father, how we praise you for that living hope, not whistling in the dark, not blind faith, not living in cloud cuckoo land, but based on the solid facts that Jesus died, that he was buried, that he rose again, that one day he will return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

We know this is a message which our world needs. A world which has lost its way in so many respects. A culture which so often is in decay.

So many good things in human culture. So much to admire and appreciate and enjoy in literature, art and music and architecture. And yet so much that is decadent.

So much that is of only transient significance. And so much that is plain corrupting and ungodly. Our institutions need this message.

[1 : 3 9] So often people in power govern for themselves rather than those they govern. So often those in authority forget to be servants.

So often the rich despise the poor. And the clever despise those that regard the stupid. How much we need this living hope. How much we need it in our churches.

So often this hope, if it's expressed at all, is expressed in a timid and partial or even unbelieving way. Father, we ask for a new recapturing of this vision.

The vision of Christ crucified, risen, ascended and returning. Transform the church and so to transform the world. And for ourselves, we need it in our own personal lives.

We are vulnerable. We are mortal. We are subject to all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. To all the ailments, the illnesses and the changes and chances of this fleeting life.

[2 : 4 7] And so we want to rest, to build our lives on this hope. And so in these moments we ask that you will speak to us. We ask that these truths that we read about and consider will transform our lives.

And so send us out into the world with a message that will change that world and change the individuals in it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now to our Bible reading, which you'll find on page 961 in the Pew Bibles. Our subject today is a sure hope.

Last week we looked at the saving gospel in verses 1 to 11 of this chapter, based on the great facts that Christ died, was buried, and especially that he rose again.

That changes everything. And now Paul is going on to develop the ideas that he's raised there and their implications. And we read from verses 12 to 34.

[3 : 52] Paul writes, Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 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 vain, and your faith is in vain. We're 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.

But if the dead are not raised, even Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.

Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

[5 : 03] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order, Christ the first fruits. Then at his coming, those who belong to Christ.

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every rule, and every authority and power. For he must reign, until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says all things are put in subjection, it is plain that he is accepted, who put all things in subjection under him.

When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him, who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? Why am I in danger every hour?

[6 : 14] I protest, brothers, for my pride in you, which have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I die every day. What do I gain, if humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?

If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up from your drunken stupor as is right, and do not go on sinning, for some have no knowledge of God.

I say this to your shame. Amen. And may God bless to us that reading from his word. About four years ago, for many months, the best-selling list was topped by the Da Vinci Code, that book which isn't bad at all as a thriller, but which gives an absurd picture of the early church, full of inaccuracies, and the worst thing about it is it fizzles out.

It's not even very good as a thriller. If any of you have read it, and I say it's not a bad thriller, it fizzles out in Roslyn Chapel. There is no big picture, there is no big story.

That's what Paul is talking about here, the big picture. We need the big picture from God's first creation to his new creation. If there is no resurrection, there is no prospect of a new creation, and no solution to the world's problems.

[7 : 46] Paul, as we'll see this week and next week, is illustrating what he says in the first verses, Christ died and rose in accordance with the scriptures. The big picture from Adam to the new creation, the resurrection makes sense of the story.

Without the resurrection, the story falls apart. And Paul is further saying, we need to believe that our beliefs have consequences. May people live in a comfortable fog.

They're not particularly worrying too much, as long as they believe something, and live fairly decent lives. Paul says this is not true. You can't believe what you like, and still live the Christian life.

Verse 34, bad company ruins good morals. The gospel, if it's denied, the resurrection, if it's not believed in, leads to wrong behaviour.

So our subject today is a sure hope. From the saving gospel flows the sure hope. And three things. First of all, a dreadful prospect in verses 12 to 19.

[8 : 57] Many of the Corinthians were denying, as I said last week, that Christians would be bodily raised. They didn't like bodies. They were terribly super spiritual. They wanted to be pure spirit in the world to come.

Paul says, look, if you deny the resurrection of the body, then even Christ has not risen. And if you deny that, you're not just denying part of the gospel, the whole gospel falls apart.

Take out this brick, and the wall collapses. Pull out this thread, and the garment unravels. And the consequences are dire. If Christ is not raised, first of all, his work has failed.

Chilling consequences. Verse 17, If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. See, if Christ hasn't been raised, think about it this way.

Christ stood in for us. We were subject to the anger of God. Well, if Christ is not raised, God has not accepted Christ standing in for us.

[10 : 01] The curtain of the temple has not been torn, and a way blazed into the presence of God. We do not have a high priest who has gone into heaven. Therefore, our faith is vain.

We'll have to rewrite our resurrection hymns, won't we? Low in the grave he lay, his body is still there today. There in the ground he remains, no answer to our problems and pains.

Now, apart from that being appalling doggerel, we're not likely to sing hallelujah to that. Low in the grave he lay, balanced by up from the grave he arose.

Because that is the resurrection faith. If his body, or if his remains, are still in the tomb, as many of the thrillers spawned by the Da Vinci Code allege, I was reading these stories about some bones being discovered in a crypt underneath the temple mount.

And if you're looking for cloud cuckoo land thrillers for holidays, which I rather enjoy, then that's fine. But if that is what we believe in, then the whole gospel falls apart.

[11 : 05] Indeed, we don't have a gospel to proclaim. Last week we sang, we have a gospel to proclaim good news for all throughout the earth. We've nothing to say. And of course, that's why so much preaching has nothing to say.

Because it doesn't believe in the great certainty of Christ died and risen. And verses 17 to 19, we have no hope for the future.

We cannot believe in the living Christ. His kingdom will not come. And verse 18, these terrifying words, those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If Christ has not risen, our loved ones who died believing in him have gone forever. because they died in their sins. And we cannot say the words that Paul has already said in chapter 1, sorry, in chapter 6, verse 11 of this letter, talking about what the Corinthians were.

He says, but you were washed, you were sanctified. Except, and this brings us on to the second part of the section, there is another but, verse 20, but, in fact, Christ has been raised.

[12 : 18] So let's go on from the, let's go on from the, the first part, the dreadful prospect, to the glorious reality, in verses 20 to 28.

But, he has been raised. And not only has he been raised, verse 25, he must reign, until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

You see, the resurrection is not just something tagged on at the end. It's not that we live our lives, and then at the end, there is resurrection. It means that because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, an irreversible movement has begun, which is going to lead to the new heaven, and the new earth.

That's why Paul says in Acts 17, God will judge the world by a man whom he has appointed. How do we know that? Because he's raised him from the dead.

The judgment, the new creation, has begun. And he is the first fruit, guaranteeing the rest. Verse 23, Christ, the first fruit, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ.

[13 : 28] And just as unbelief in the resurrection has dismal, disastrous consequences, so, belief in the glorious reality of the resurrection has glorious consequences, first of all, the big story will be completed.

Then comes the end. Probably would be better to say the big story will go on forever, as C.S. Lewis says, at the end of Narnia, he had begun that great story which no one on earth has ever read, in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Churchill called the end of the beginning, so to speak. And he uses the Adam-Christ comparison. So you want to understand the big story.

You've got to look at the two representative men, Adam and Christ, uses this in Romans as well. In Adam, verse 22, all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Think of that sharp and stark and eternal consequence. In a graveyard on the east coast of Scotland, near the village I grew up in, there is a gravestone on which of these poignant words, O Adam, what have you done?

[14 : 50] The whole chain of human misery, the whole chain of human grief, traced back to this one man who sinned, and whose sin caused the entrance of this great monster death in the world.

Now this is not preaching universalism here. Paul is talking exclusively in this chapter about the resurrection of Christians. Now the Bible does talk about the resurrection of those who are not Christians.

That's not the point here. Paul's concern in verse 18, those who have fallen asleep in Christ. And then again in verse 23, those who belong to Christ.

So Paul is talking here about the resurrection of Christians. Because Christ rose, the big story will be completed and our little stories, if we belong to Christ, will be completed as well.

That's the point that he's making. Our stories will not fizzle out in Rosalind Chapel or anywhere else. Whatever happens in our earthly lives, there is this great story beyond.

[15 : 56] Because Christ has done the decisive deed. God has raised him from the dead. The second consequence is that Christ will reign. Verse 25, he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. These verses show what Paul means when he talks about in accordance with the scriptures.

As he had deeply rooted in the Old Testament, he must reign. Reflecting Psalm 110, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool.

Incidentally, that's the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. And then Psalm 8, verse 6, talking about humanity. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands.

You have put all things under his feet. This is the Son of Man who gave his life and who will come in the clouds of heaven to judge the world.

[17 : 03] And how do we know that? We know that because he died and rose again. In that passage in 1 Thessalonians where Paul talks about the coming of the Lord and the destiny of all who believe in him, he raises this question again.

How do we know that Christ will return? How do we know that the dead will be raised and the living will be changed? And he says, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again.

In other words, we know what will happen in the future because of two things about Jesus we know that have already happened. Jesus died and rose again.

And he will destroy the last enemy. Literally, the last enemy that is being destroyed is death. It's already been given the death blow.

But it's yet to give up its struggle, so to speak. You see, what Paul is saying here is not just that people will not die any longer in the new creation.

[18 : 09] He's saying there's no possibility of dying because death itself, that grim monster that straddles human history, that grim frontier post that brings all our hopes to an end.

That is going to be destroyed. The poet Dunn says, Death, be not proud, though some have called you mighty and dreadful. Death, you will die.

So, the big story will be completed. Christ will reign. And then he says, God will be, that God may be all in all. Verse 28.

Now, it's very important not to misunderstand these verses 27 and 28. Verse 27, God has put all things in subjection under his feet. When it says, all things are put in subjection, it is plain that he is accepted who put all things in subjection under him.

When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him that God may be all in all.

[19 : 16] Now, God will be God and the world will know it. God is God at the moment, but the world don't know it. If you go down Buchanan Street after this and ask people if they know that God is God and that Christ will return in the clouds in power and great glory, you'll probably get funny looks.

Now, what does this mean, though? The Son will be subjected. Does that mean that Christ the Son of God will become inferior to the Father? Now, that's not what's being said because that would destroy the Gospel itself.

The Gospel is about the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Think about the way the thought's been developing. Christ here is, excuse me, Christ here is the Son of Man, the representative human, the one who won back what Adam lost.

And as representative human, as the last Adam, it's as it were, he hands over the kingdom to the Father and says, Father, the job is done.

I've carried out the work and humanity, redeemed humanity, is now able to take over its true destiny as stewards of the new creation.

[20 : 37] as part of the Godhead, of course, the reign of Father, Son and Holy Spirit continues to all eternity. But the task, not only of redeeming humanity, but the much more glorious task of recreating the universe, that is now completed.

And therefore, the eternal glory can begin. But this brings us to the third part, which I call the challenging warning, verses 29 to 34.

Notice how the thought develops. We've had this dreadful prospect. We've had the glorious reality. And Paul is now saying, look, this has consequences for daily living.

It's not just a beautiful idea that we sing hymns about and feel gooey about inside. It has consequences for daily living. If we are truly followers of the Son of Man, if we are truly to live, to anticipate the new creation.

Now, Paul, in this letter, is responding to many of the questions the Corinthians raised. Probably, the Corinthian church has sent him a letter which they raise various problems.

[21 : 52] This is this curious custom. Verse 29, what do people mean by being baptised on behalf of the dead? Commentators find this question difficult to answer. There are at least 50 explanations of this, which I'm not going to go into or even mention.

But most of them make one elementary mistake. They assume that Paul is talking about a custom he approves of rather than a wrong custom.

And it seems to me that he's not saying, oh by the way, baptising people for those who have died is a good thing. What he's saying is something like this.

Even if you have this silly view that it's a good thing to baptise people by proxy for those who have died, even on your magical view of baptism so to speak, the resurrection is necessary.

That's what I think he's saying. Now, you may think I'm just skimming over the surface. but I'd be happy to talk to anybody about it afterwards if they have any problems with that.

[23 : 03] Paul is saying this is a silly custom but even if you believe in this silly custom you still need the resurrection. I mean, after all, Mormons baptise people, baptised for the dead taking this verse literally and misunderstanding it.

You see, what Paul is saying in the long time, what Paul is saying what matters is not the custom of baptising for the dead which is wrong anyway but the fact that Christ has risen.

Obviously, in the long term, the overwhelming majority of God's people have died before the glory comes, before Christ returns. After all, there will be one generation of the church still alive when Christ returns.

I don't know and you don't know whether anyone in this room will be part of that generation will still be alive when the Lord returns. We are in the last days but the last days began when Christ ascended to heaven.

These are the last days. We don't know where we are in the last days. We travel with our backs to the engine and we don't know how near we are to the station. So, what he's saying is whatever customs you may have in this the important thing is to concentrate on the fact that Christ has been raised.

[24 : 22] And he talks about his own experience as an apostle. Here and more especially in 2 Corinthians he's attacking those rather answering those who have attacked him as an inferior apostle.

Basically he's saying look brothers I protest verse 31 by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord I die every day.

But do I gain if humanly speaking I fought with beasts at Ephesus commentators argue whether this means he fought in the arena as a gladiator that's very unlikely since he was a Roman citizen it's a metaphor a picture of his opponents.

Anything I've done as an apostle depends on this one fact that Christ is risen. Challenging warning don't get obsessed with silly customs don't listen to those who attack my apostleship.

And finally he concludes this section wake up from your drunken stupor as is right and do not go on sinning. You see he's basically saying you instead of being enlightened you instead of having superior knowledge some have no knowledge of God at all.

[25 : 43] The problem with Corinthian Christianity he loved the idea of spiritual elites. He loved the idea that were some Christians who were superior to others.

Remember when Paul uses the word spiritual he means a Christian someone who has the spirit of God. As he says if someone doesn't have the spirit of Christ they don't belong to Christ.

There is no super spiritual elite. And this super spiritual elite very far from being an elite were actually putting themselves out of the family of God altogether by denying the resurrection.

They did not know God. So you see how practical all this is. Resurrection is not some dream in the future.

Resurrection is a practical daily reality. The only reason we can live the Christian life in the present is because Christ has already risen. The only reason we know that we will make it to the new creation is because Christ is risen.

[26 : 49] This is the event which saved us. This is the event which saves us now and this is the event which will eventually save us on the last day.

Amen. Let's pray. And in fact Christ has been raised from the dead the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

I will rejoice in this Father that it is not some glorious theory, not some wild speculation but a real historical fact that just as he died and was buried he is risen and he is Lord and one day will return in power and great glory.

And so help us as we struggle in our earthly lives to look forward to that time when God will be all in all. We ask this in his name.

Amen.