

The Pledge of the Empty Tomb

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- [0 : 0 0] Christ is risen. He is risen. 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 by their faces to the ground, the men said to them, Why do you seek the living and 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. And returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to 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.
- [1 : 0 8] But these words seemed to them but an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb, stooping and looking in.
- He saw the linen cloths by themselves, and he went home marveling at what had happened. As we sit, let's pray together.
- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- Because our glorious king now lives, death has lost its sting. Because he died once, our souls to save.
- There is no longer any boasting, any victory in the grave for those who are his, for those who love and who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [2 : 1 8] He lives today, and therefore death and hell hath no more terror. How we praise you, living God, for the risen glory of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- And so as we gather this morning on this Easter day to sing his praise, to rejoice in the truth of his gospel, we pray that you would fill our hearts with joy, with gladness, and with peace.
- And that we might go from this place assured and reassured of sins forgiven, of peace with God, and of the glorious hope of everlasting life to come.
- For we ask it in his blessed name. Amen. Amen. Do please be seated. And if you'd turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter and chapter 1.
- 1 Peter chapter 1. And I think if you have our church Bibles, that ought to be about a page 1004 or 1005, something like that. Of course, in the first Easter morning, neither Peter nor the other disciples grasped the meaning of the resurrection at all.
- [3 : 4 5] As we read in Luke's account, at the very beginning of the service, they were first of all perplexed. Then they were very afraid. It was only after being rebuked by the angel and then by Jesus himself and instructed from the scriptures that they began to believe.

And they came to faith. Faith, of course, that was based upon incontrovertible evidence of the physical presence of Jesus in front of them. And informed by the significance of the teaching that the scriptures themselves brought to bear upon this event of the resurrection.

And so, of course, by the time you get to Luke's second installment of his book, The Acts of the Apostles, Peter is utterly clear. The scriptures had to be fulfilled, he says in Acts 1.

He'd learned his lesson. They've learned what Jesus taught them again and again in Luke 24 as he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And as you read on in the book of Acts, you find that the resurrection of Jesus is the very heart of the apostolic preaching.

Always Paul's preaching also later on. This Jesus has been received into heaven, Peter said, until the time for the restoration of all things that God spoke about long ago through the mouths of his prophets.

[5 : 11] And so they proclaimed Jesus' resurrection from the dead. That's the focus of the apostles' preaching all through the New Testament.

The significance and the implications of a Christ who died, but who rose and who is now exalted, seated at the right hand of God.

And in Peter's first letter that we've been studying recently to struggling Christians in distant parts of the Roman Empire, many years later, again, it is the reality of the resurrection of Jesus that fills his writing.

It permeates this whole letter. But Peter makes two very specific references to Jesus' resurrection in this letter. And it's these two things I want us to focus our thoughts on this Easter morning for our encouragement, for our understanding, I hope, and also for our blessing.

He writes in the context of the many struggles of life that Christian believers face, both the pressures from without, the real hostility of society's opposition, the pagan society, and perhaps even the persecution of the state itself.

[6 : 26] And he writes also thinking of the real pressures that Christians face from within, the struggles with our own sins that are stirred up so greatly by the roaring of that great enemy that Peter calls him, the devil himself.

It's in that context that Peter points us to the resurrection of Jesus. And he says to his readers and to us that we need to hold on to the reality that the resurrection of Jesus pledges to us.

A pledge and an absolute promise to every true believer of the blessing of two wonderful things that Peter focuses on. The resurrection gives us to the resurrection of Jesus' resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus' resurrection.

Okay, do open your Bibles again. I think it's page 1014. 1014 in the church Bibles. The first explicit reference to the resurrection in 1 Peter is in chapter 1, verse 3.

[8 : 23] And then again in verse 21. These verses are like in closing brackets in that first theme that Peter deals about, which is all about hope. The living hope of glory.

And it's this first pledge of the empty tomb of Jesus, according to Peter, that he's speaking about here. This hope. Because Jesus rose from the dead that first Easter morning, those who trust in Christ do have and can have and must have certain hope.

We have a living hope, says Peter, of glory to come in our resurrection to life everlasting. Let's read verses 3 to 7 of chapter 1.

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.

He says, We have a certain hope of glory, says Peter, Because Christ has already been raised to resurrection life.

[10 : 17] And that glory, that salvation is ready, says to be revealed in the last time, verse 5. Do you see? Because as verse 4 says, It is already reserved, it's kept in heaven for all who have faith in Jesus Christ.

Our resurrection glory is already reserved for us because of Jesus' resurrection. And it will be revealed in us at Jesus' return.

Both of those things we must grasp very clearly. First of all, Peter is clear. Our resurrection glory, our glorious salvation, is not yet revealed. That's why, as Paul says in Romans 8, we're saved in hope.

Now, he says you don't hope for what you already see, what you already fully possess. Look at verse 4. Our hope is for salvation that Peter calls an inheritance, imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

Oh, does that describe any of us here this morning? Are our bodies indestructible? Are our lives undefiled, untouched completely by sin?

[11 : 26] Are they? Is our glory unfading? Are we all free from wrinkles and receding hairlines and all of these things? Not from where I'm looking.

Although, probably, gentlemen, it would be a good idea if you just gazed lovingly at your wife and nodded and said, Yes, I don't see any wrinkles or anything.

Probably make for a better Easter weekend. But I'm afraid it's not really true, is it? The cold reality must prevail. And Peter is perfectly plain.

The glory of this salvation will not be revealed, he says, verse 5, until when? Until the last time. Because only that, and nothing less than that, is, what he calls in verse 9, if you look down, the outcome of our faith.

Do you see? The salvation of our souls. Don't be misled by the word soul there, by the way. It's not what we usually mean in the Bible. The word soul doesn't mean just the spiritual, the non-bodily part of us.

[12 : 30] It means the whole of us. The whole of our being. And that is our hope, says Peter. The glorious renewal forever of our whole being.

Mind and heart and spirit and personality and emotions and intellect and imagination and everything and our bodies.

Every part of our entire humanity renewed gloriously like Christ's. To the completeness of the true human glory of life as God created it to be.

We're created to be images of his glory, which is imperishable and undefiled and unfading. And Peter says, one day we shall be untouched by death. No death or sickness anymore.

And we will be unstained by sin and evil. Gone forever. We will be unimpaired forever by time. That is our certain hope.

[13 : 32] The pledge of the empty tomb for everyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ. For everyone who trusts in the God who raised Jesus himself from the dead.

And that hope, friends, is utterly life transforming. It's as radical as being born all over again into a totally transformed life.

A life with completely different and transformed expectations. A life that will be completely changed in every way because we know where it's going.

And that's why Peter calls it here in verse 3, a new birth. It is exactly like that. A birth all over again into a changed world with a living hope.

Must be terrible, mustn't it? To be born as a child into some of the situations, some of the dreadful situations. That some children are born into in the world today, in parts of the world.

[14 : 35] Dreadful poverty and violence and abuse and exploitation. With no hope, no future, just despair. You can imagine, can't you?

It's not hard. Children in that situation thinking to themselves, If only I'd been born in a different family, in a different nation, in a different home, in a different world.

And sometimes, of course, for the very fortunate few, perhaps through being rescued by adoption, something like that does indeed happen to them.

They are brought into a new life, a transformed life in another country. Into a home where there is love and care. Where the future prospects are so completely and utterly different.

But you see, that, in a far, far more radical way, is what Jesus' resurrection does for us. The empty tomb is the pledge of a certain hope of glory.

[15 : 36] And though it's not yet revealed, Peter does say it is already reserved, verse 4. It's kept in heaven for us. And in verse 5, you see, he says, We are being kept, we are being guarded through faith for this sure salvation.

You see, it is certain because it's in God's hands and not ours. If you're going on a holiday abroad with small children, those boarding passes are the pledge for your holiday destination, aren't they?

You don't give that boarding pass to your five-year-old child and you say, well, we'll see you in the baggage hall at the other end. There's not much certainty in that. If I tell you that a friend of mine did something really rather like that in a busy airport in Italy some years ago, I don't think I need to elaborate on how that story went.

There was no certainty. There was catastrophe. Although, in the end, it worked out, I hasten to add. But if you want certainty in that situation, you keep the boarding pass in one hand and you keep your five-year-old firmly in the other hand until you are on that plane.

And you see, that is what Jesus' resurrection means for us, says Peter. He has won a great salvation for us and he has it in his hand, ready to be revealed at the last time.

[17 : 01] And he has us in his hand, ready, if you like, for when boarding begins, for that glorious destination.

His hand is firmly gripping us and will not let go until that day. And that's why our hope is alive, Peter says. It's a living hope.

It's a certain hope. Or as Paul puts it, it's a hope that will never be put to shame. It'll never be found to have been a dead hope, a vain hope.

Nothing at all like our vain hopes. We use that word so emptily today, don't we? We hope this lovely Easter weather will keep going all summer from now on.

We hope that at last, Scotland will win the World Cup in rugby or in football or in anything. No, our hope is certain because it rests on God's promise and on God's power, which has been demonstrated unequivocally in the resurrection of Jesus.

[18 : 11] Look down to verse 21. Our faith and hope are in God, says Peter, the God who raised Jesus from the dead, giving him glory. That's true already.

That's a fact. Now, in a moment, we'll look at chapter 3, verse 22, where Peter tells us that Jesus has already gone into heaven, is at God's right hand.

All powers in heaven and earth are subject to him. And from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead, as we said in the creed.

And Jesus' resurrection reminds us that God's power cannot be in doubt. That Jesus' exaltation cannot be in doubt.

And that therefore the completion of all God's plan and purpose from before the creation of this world cannot be in doubt. And that Jesus will be at the last revealed to the world as a judge and as the Savior of all who have trusted in him.

[19 : 22] And that verse 7, look, our faith and our hope will be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It is all pledged by the empty tomb of Jesus. And that, of course, is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Christ is not risen and the tomb is not truly empty, then Christians are more to be pitied than anyone else on earth.

We are utter fools if that is the case. It all hinges on the truth of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. But Paul says Christ is risen.

The first fruits, that is the one who shows all the rest of his people what their destiny truly will be. And that's why Peter says here in chapter 1 verse 13, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The pledge of the empty tomb means that we have a certain hope, a living hope of glory to come. The glory of a resurrection like Jesus and with Jesus.

[20 : 48] Now, friends, what could be more wonderful this Easter for those whose hearts are full of sorrow and bereavement? We were speaking about these things just on Tuesday here at the funeral of our beloved John Whitefield.

Speaking from John chapter 14, those wonderful words of Jesus in the upper room. I'm going, he said, to prepare a place for you through the power of his cross, through the cross that brings rescue and restoration and reconciliation with God as we were saying on Friday.

And then those wonderful words of Jesus after the resurrection when he says, go and tell the disciples that I am now going to my father and your father. I've prepared the place and all that remains is for me to come again and bring you to be with me where I am forever.

You can be sure, he is saying, the place is prepared. It's open. I am the way and I am the life. We have a certain hope.

Friends, every single human being needs hope. We can't live without hope. Otherwise we'd be in despair. That's why people take their own lives because they have no hope.

[22 : 11] They're in despair. We need hope because we as creatures are made to hope. We're made to hope for the glory of God.

We're made to hope for the glory of eternity that God has set inside every human heart. But if our hope is not true hope, anchored in the promise of God, then we'll spend our lives chasing all kinds of false hopes, won't we?

Vain hopes, dead hopes. We'll be seeking heaven, but seeking it now, here in this world, in this life. And friends, that is a dead hope.

That is a deadly hope because everything in this world is perishable. Everything in this world is defiled and everything in this world is fading away.

And if you live setting your hope on these things, however near and real and tangible they may seem now, today, in the end, as the Lord Jesus himself said, either the moth or the rust will destroy them or the thief will come in and steal them away.

[23 : 27] And if not that, then with certainty in the end, the great thief of death will rob you of every last vestige of these vain and empty hopes.

But if Jesus did rise from the dead, then the pledge of that empty tomb can and must give us a certain hope for the future.

And it's that hope that transforms our present, too, in the rebirth of a whole perspective on life, a perspective that enables us to persevere even amid great struggle and persecutions as Peter's readers were facing.

Do you see verse 8? Even though, he says, we don't yet see Jesus restored and returned in all his glory, we believe in him. And in the midst of all these trials, he says, we rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

Why? Because, as verse 9 goes on to say, we know that we are receiving and will receive the outcome of our faith, our full salvation, salvation of our whole being.

[24 : 39] We have a certain hope, a pledge of the empty tomb, a living hope of glory to come. Do open your Bibles again.

So, the pledge of the empty tomb is the blessing of certain hope, the living hope of glory to come in our resurrection from the dead.

But, if you look at 1 Peter 3, verse 21, Peter points us to another wonderful pledge through Christ's resurrection, and it's the pledge even now of cleansed hearts.

we have the living peace of guilt washed away through Jesus' resurrection and ascension to glory. Let's just read from the middle of verse 20.

God's patience waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you.

[25 : 43] not as a removal of filth from the body, but as an appeal or as a pledge to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

And the scholars differ over whether it should read as our Bible has, an appeal to God for a good conscience or, if you have an NIV, a pledge towards God or even something different.

But either way, the main thing is very clear that this good conscience, this clear conscience is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, Peter says here that the whole of our salvation represented in baptism is a result of Christ's resurrection.

It's a washing of sorts, but not a bodily washing in the act of baptism. Rather, baptism signifies a deep and lasting cleansing of the heart.

The sprinkling of Christian baptism speaks of a far greater sprinkling that sanctifies, that makes holy forever, ultimately, and completely, and cleanses the conscience from all sins for those who put their trust in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 06] Christ. If you remember Peter's opening words in this letter in chapter 1, verse 3, you'll see that he says there, and he speaks there about this sprinkling. True believers, he says, are chosen in the foreknowledge of the Father by the sanctification of the Spirit for, literally, obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And Christian baptism is an outward expression of these twin facts. As the scholar Howard Marshall puts it, that God alone regenerates you by his Spirit on the basis of the atonement brought by Christ, and that you come committing yourself in faith and repentance, that is, in obedience to Christ as your Savior and Lord.

But notice that Peter says explicitly in chapter 3, verse 21, that this saving cleansing is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not just through the cross, which is how we normally think of it.

Now, of course, it is through his death on the cross that we are rescued, that we are restored, that we are reconciled fully to God as we saw on Good Friday.

Peter's very clear about that. But not the cross alone without the resurrection. Peter is equally clear here explicitly that the cleansing of our hearts, that the washing away of our sins forever, indeed, our whole salvation is only complete and certain through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[28 : 46] But it is the pledge of the empty tomb that our hearts are fully cleansed. And therefore, we can now have the living peace of a clear conscience before God.

We can know that our sins have been washed away already forever. But why through the resurrection? Well, Peter, I think, is alluding here to something that the writer to the Hebrews fleshes out in a little bit more detail.

I think it'll help us to understand it if we turn there briefly as we close this morning just to get it clear in our minds. If you turn back a few pages to Hebrews chapter 9, I think that is page 1006 in the church Bibles, we shall see.

When Peter talks about obedience and sprinkling by the blood of Jesus Christ, he's speaking of Christians being bound to the Lord Jesus, bound to God as his covenant people in the new covenant that will be everlasting, the covenant that has been fulfilled finally and forever in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But of course, the language he uses echoes the language of the old covenant, the covenant of promise under Moses. Back in Exodus chapter 24, at Sinai, after the giving of the law, Israel of old was bound to God in obedience and in sprinkling with the blood of the covenant as God called it.

[30 : 14] That was what sanctified them, set them apart as holy as God's people. So if you look at Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 18, that's what he's speaking of.

Not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, that's at Sinai, he took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop and sprinkled both the book itself, the book of the covenant, and all the people, saying, this is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.

And in the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tent, that is, the place of meeting, the tabernacle between God and the people, and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

See, the sprinkling of water and of blood to purify the sinful people and indeed to purify the tent, the place where God met with his people, so that they might be in fellowship with God, able to be in his presence, despite the real guilt on their consciences.

But you see, here's the thing, that cleansing could never be permanent. That's why day after day, year after year, especially on the great day of atonement, the ritual shedding of blood sacrifices had to go on and on because, as Hebrews 9, verse 9 says, these sacrifices of themselves cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper.

[31 : 49] Only through what they promised ultimately in the future. These rituals of the Old Testament law, of the Old Covenant, on their own, of themselves, could never do that.

That was obvious to all people of faith, of real faith. Hebrews 10, verse 4 says, it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Well, of course it is. King David knew that only too well. Read his great Psalm of Penitence, Psalm 51. He's very clear there, isn't he? He knew that offerings and sacrifices alone could never cleanse him, so he cried out to God for the reality to which these things pointed to him.

God's promised cleansing of the heart and of the spirit once and for all. And that's what the whole Old Testament longed for and looked forward to. The day of fulfillment, the day of God's great salvation, when at last he would deal with sins once and for all and forever.

The day of Christ. And Christ did come and his blood could and did cleanse from sins once and for all and forever.

- [33 : 05] Two of the great words in the letters of the Hebrews. Look at Hebrews 9, verse 11. When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then, through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is not of this creation, he entered once and for all into the holy places.

That's his resurrection. Not by means of the blood of goats and cows, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, how much more will the blood of Christ purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Do you see? At last, a sprinkling that doesn't have to be repeated endlessly because it purifies the conscience forever. But I want you to see and notice when that everlasting cleansing is complete.

Look down to verse 23. Thus, it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things, that's the tabernacle, the tent, to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

For Christ has entered in his resurrection, not into the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

- [34 : 54] Do you see? The defilement of man's sin that has tainted and made filthy even heaven itself, the place of God's chosen dwelling with his people.

That is cleansed only when Jesus appears in our place, on our behalf, to sanctify heaven itself by the presence of perfect and purified obedient humanity and therefore to act as our great high priest forever.

Look down to chapter 10, verse 10. Do you see? He says, we've been sanctified, we've been made clean and holy at last through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The death of Jesus once for all. But read on, when was that cleansing made complete, made certain? Verse 11, every priest stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins, but when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God in his resurrection.

Now waiting for that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet, for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

- [36 : 24] See, Christ's cleansing purifying, washing away of our sins that makes us holy in God's sight. It's completed by his resurrection and ascension to be our priest forever at God's right hand where his blood that was once shed now and forever as we sang pleads peace for us and by that power his saints forever shall stand.

Stand justified in God's sight every stain on our guilty conscience removed and declared to be removed to the whole of heaven publicly by the presence of the risen Lord Jesus risen human flesh in glory.

That's why Paul says in Romans 4 he was raised for our justification not crucified for our justification. We're sprinkled clean our consciences are pure through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Hearts are cleansed forever from sins past and sins present and yes even from sins future. That's the pledge of the empty tomb of Easter morning.

It's a pledge for even the vilest offender today who truly believes. now friends if that isn't something that thrills your heart today then all I can say is that you must be much much less of a sinner than I am.

[38 : 04] You must be much much less conscious than I am of how unclean your heart feels and how guilty your conscience feels. Now dismally you've failed the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe you have never had to weep those bitter tears with Peter that he himself wept when he so dreadfully denied the Lord Jesus and let him down. But if you have as I have been in the place of Peter then let me tell you this pledge is so very very precious that because he arose we can be sure utterly assured that he has put away our sins once and for all that he has sprinkled our hearts clean from our evil consciences that he's washed us forever with pure pure water and we are holy in his sight spotless beautiful and to be welcomed.

That means nothing can ever close heaven to us anymore never it means nothing can keep our prayers from God our Father not even our sin that makes us want to stop praying nothing can stand as a bar to God's presence with us even the taunts of the devil who wants to tell us that God has fled from us nothing can separate us from his love not because of what I have attained or you have attained but because he arose and he sits at the right hand of the Father and that's why the Hebrews writer speaks these wonderful words in chapter 10 verse 19 therefore brothers since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that he has opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh now in heaven and since we have a great high priest over the house of

God let us draw near to him with a true heart in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who is promised is faithful we have a certain hope and we have cleansed hearts the living hope of glory to come in our resurrection to life everlasting and the living peace now today of guilt washed away to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that's the pledge the glorious pledge of the empty tomb this Easter morning and so what can we do but sing hallelujah hallelujah hearts to heaven and voices raised sing to

God a hymn of gladness sing to God a hymn of praise he who on the cross a victim for the world's salvation blood Jesus Christ the king of glory now is risen from the dead