The Pledge of the Empty Tomb

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Preacher: William Philip

[0:00] Amen. Well, before we come to God's Word, let's pray together. Up from the grave he arose as the victor over every foe.

! And in that wonderful event was the great triumph that brought life and immortality to light in man and for man forever.
Because, as the Apostle tells us, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.
And how we thank you, Lord, that we, because of that, have been brought into a living hope through that resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. So help us, Lord, help us now to hear and to grasp and to rejoice in this gospel of the risen Lord Jesus.
May our hearts be filled afresh with a glorious certain hope and our lives gladly surrendered to him. To walk with him every day, all the days of our lives.
[1:15] Until our eyes also shall see him as he truly is. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Would you turn with me to 1 Peter, chapter 1.

And page 1014, I think, in the Church Visitors Bibles. And we're going to look again at some of the things that the Apostle Peter tells us about Jesus' resurrection.
On that first Easter morning, neither Peter nor the other disciples grasped the meaning of the resurrection at all, did they? We read in Luke's account at the beginning of how at first they were perplexed.
And then they were afraid. And it was only after they were rebuked, first by the angels and then actually by Jesus himself, only after that, that Jesus instructed them from the scriptures.
And they began to believe. They began to have faith. Faith based on that incontrovertible evidence of the presence of the risen Jesus.
[2:25] And faith informed by the prophetic scriptures that had explained long in advance the meaning of this long-promised event.

So when you get on to Luke's second volume of his book, that's the Acts of the Apostles, as we call it, Peter is then totally clear. The scriptures had to be fulfilled, he says.
They learned what Jesus had taught them in Luke, chapter 24, and no doubt repeatedly afterwards. As he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.
So when you read in Acts, chapter 2, in Acts, chapter 3, what you see is that the resurrection is absolutely at the heart of Peter's preaching about Jesus. Just as it's at the heart of Paul's preaching about Jesus later on.
This Jesus, says Peter, has been received into heaven until the time for the restoration of all things that God spoke about long ago through the mouth of his holy prophets.
[3:24] And the apostles all proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. That is the focus of all the preaching that the book of Acts records.

It's all about the significance, the implications of the Messiah, the Christ, who died but who arose and is exalted at God's right hand.
And Peter's first letter here, which he wrote to struggling Christians throughout the Roman Empire. In this letter, he also concentrates constantly on the resurrection.
Permits the whole letter. But Peter makes several very specific references to Jesus' resurrection.
And these are some of the things I want to focus on this Easter morning and again this evening.
Because he wrote them for the encouragement, for the blessing of Christian people. People who were struggling with life. Struggling with hostility, with opposition to their faith from people round about in the culture.

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[4:32] Some of them even being persecuted perhaps by the state. Christians who were struggling just as we struggle with inner things. Struggling with their sinfulness, with the temptations that are stirred up by the evil one, by Satan himself.

Who Peter says is always prowling around like a lion trying to destroy, trying to devour us. It was in that context. And to people just like that, just like us.
That Peter points us above all other things to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he tells us that we need to lay hold of that great truth of Christ's resurrection.
Because it is an absolute pledge, an absolute promise to every single Christian believer. A blessing of two wonderful things. Peter says it's the pledge of a living hope for the future in the face of our frail and fragile mortality.
It means we don't have to live with any fear of death any longer. And it's also the pledge of a living peace now about our past.
[5:39] But also in the present. In the face of our very feeble and flawed morality. So that we can live with no guilt in life anymore.

The pledge of the empty tomb, the message of the resurrection, is that because Jesus died and rose from the dead, all his people can have and do have certain hope of glory to come.
And cleansed hearts already. Through the washing away and the forgiveness of our sins. We know that our hope is certain because Jesus rose.
And we know that our hearts are cleansed already. Because Jesus rose. And I want to dwell this morning on these two wonderful truths. This Easter Sunday.
Now the first explicit reference to the resurrection in Peter's letter is in chapter 1 and verse 3. And then again in verse 21. And those two verses enclose, if you like, in brackets.
[6:39] Peter's great theme, which is all about hope. Living hope of glory. And that is the first wonderful pledge of the empty tomb of Jesus, according to Peter.

Because Jesus rose from the dead that first Easter morning, those who trust in Jesus Christ can have and do have a certain hope. We know that our future is certain.
We have a living hope of glory to come in our own resurrection to everlasting life. Look at verse 3. I'll read it again.
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. We have a certain hope of glory, says Peter.
[7:38] Because Christ has already been raised to that glorious resurrection life. And that glory, our true salvation, he says, is ready to be revealed, verse 5, at the last time.

And he says it's already reserved. It's being kept in heaven for all who have faith in Jesus. Our resurrection glory is already reserved for us because of Jesus' resurrection.
And it will be revealed in us, he says, at Jesus' return. It's very important that we grasp these things clearly. Notice first that Peter says that our glorious full salvation is not yet revealed.
That's why, as Paul puts it also in Romans 8, that we're saved in hope. You don't hope for something that you already see or possess. But look at verse 4. Our hope for salvation, Peter calls it an inheritance, do you see?
Imperishable, undefiled, unfading. Now, does that describe any of us here this morning? Are our bodies indestructible? Are our lives undefiled, completely untouched by sin?
[8:56] Is our glory unfading? Are we immune from wrinkles and receding hairlines and increasing decrepitude? Not from where I'm looking.

And not how I'm feeling. No, I'm afraid the cold reality is rather different, isn't it? And so that's why Peter is being perfectly plain, you see.
The glory of that true salvation that Christ has won for us has not yet been revealed and won't be, he says, in verse 5, until the last time. And only that, you see, nothing less than that is what he calls in verse 9 the true outcome of our faith.
The salvation of our souls. Don't be misled by that word soul there. In the Bible that doesn't mean the non-bodily part of us. It means the whole person. It means the very opposite.
It's the whole of our being. And that is our true hope, Peter says. The glorious renewal forever of our whole being.

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[9:57] Our mind, our heart, our spirit, our personality, our intellect, our imagination, and our bodies. Every part of us.

Of our entire humanity. Restored to the completeness, the full glory of human life as God created it to be. As images of his true divine glory, which is imperishable, undefiled, unfading.
One day, Peter is saying, we will be untouched by death. Untouched by all human sickness. Unstained at last. By all sin and by all evil.
And unimpaired forever by time. That is our certain hope. That is the pledge of the empty tomb. For every single one who entrusts themselves to the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.
And that hope is utterly life transforming, isn't it? It's as radical as being born all over again into a totally transformed life.
[11:08] A life that's completely transformed in its expectations. And completely transformed in its experience. That's why Peter actually calls it in verse 3 there, a new birth.

We've been born again, he says, into a living hope. It must be terrible, mustn't it? To be born into some of the ghastly conditions that some little ones are born into in our world today, in parts of our world.
Dreadful poverty. Violence. Abuse. War zones. Born into a situation where there seems to be no hope.
Only despair. You can imagine, can't you, somebody living in a place like that, in conditions like that, thinking to themselves, if only I have been born into a different family.
To a different home. To a different nation. A different age. Sometimes, I suppose, for the very fortunate few, they are perhaps rescued.
[12:09] Maybe by adoption. Into something that is almost like a totally new birth. In a transformed life. In another country. In another family. In another world, it seems.

With prospects of a future that are utterly different. But you see, in a far more radical way, even than that, that is what Jesus' resurrection does for us, human beings.
The empty tomb is the pledge of a certain hope of glory. Although it's not yet fully revealed. But Peter says it is already reserved.
Verse 4. It's kept in heaven for us. And in verse 5, he says also, we are being kept, we are being guarded through faith for that sure salvation. We know it is certain.
And it's certain because it's all in God's hands and not ours. Are you going on holiday abroad? With small children? The boarding pass.
[13:14] That's the pledge of your holiday, isn't it? You don't give that boarding pass to your five-year-old child. You don't say, well, I'll see you at the other end after the baggage haul. Do you? Actually, a friend of mine.

A friend of mine did something rather like that on holiday in Italy a few years ago. I don't think I need to tell you how that worked out. It was a catastrophe. Now, if you want certainty about your holiday for you and your family, you keep the boarding pass in your hand, don't you?
In one hand. And you keep your five-year-old child in the other hand. And that, you see, is exactly what Peter's saying that Jesus' resurrection means for us.
He has won a glorious salvation for us. And he has it in his hand, ready to be revealed at the last time. And he has also in his hand us.
He's grasping our hand, guarding us by his power until that day. And that's why he says our hope is alive. It's a living hope. It's a certain hope. It'll never be put to shame, as Paul says.
[14:22] It'll never be found to be a dead hope, a vain hope, nothing at all. Like the many vain hopes that we have when we use that word, oh, I hope.

I hope this nice sunshine will still be here for the rest of the weekend. Well, it's looking dark already. I hope Scotland will one day win the World Cup. Well, you'll live a long time, I think, before you see that.
But no, no, no. Our hope is certain. Because it rests on God's promise and God's power, which he has demonstrated unequivocally by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.
Look down to verse 21 in 1 Peter 1. He says, Our faith and hope are in God, the God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory.
That's true already, you see. That's fact now. In a moment, we're going to look at chapter 3, verse 22, where he tells us that Jesus has already gone into heaven and is at God's right hand, with all powers subject to him, from which, as we said in the Creed, he will come again to judge the living

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and the dead.
[15:38] The resurrection of Jesus tells us that God's power cannot be in doubt. That Jesus' exaltation cannot be in doubt.

And therefore, that the completion of all that God has promised cannot be thwarted. That Jesus will be revealed at the last to be the judge of this world and the Savior of all who believe.
Look at verse 7. Our faith and our hope, he says, will be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
It is pledged all by the empty tomb of Jesus. That's why Paul says, the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, that if Christ is not risen, then we are truly people to be pitied by all, because we're fools.
Our hope is vain. But no, he says, Christ is risen from the dead. He is the firstfruits. He's the one who shows what our true destiny is going to be.
[16:53] And that's why Peter says here in verse 13, do you see? 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 is that we have a certain hope, a living hope of glory to come, of a glorious resurrection like Jesus and with Jesus.
What could be more wonderful this Easter for those whose hearts are full of the sorrow of bereavement and of death?
But we know our hope is certain. Every human being needs hope, don't they? Can't live without hope or else, well, we'd be in despair.
It's where people sense that they have no hope, that they despair and want to take their own lives, isn't it? They don't need to help people in that terrible despair.
[17:55] Thank God that our parliament rejected institutionalizing, helping people to take their own lives. What a terrible thing. But we have a hope of glory, the glory of the eternity that God has set in every human heart.

That's why human beings hope. We were made to hope for glory. But you see, if our hope isn't that true hope that God gives us, then we'll spend our lives chasing false hope, vain hopes, dead hopes. Seeking heaven now, in this world, in this life. But that is a dead hope. Indeed, that's a deadly hope, isn't it?
Because everything in this world is perishable. It is defiled. It is fading. And where people live setting their hope on these fading things, however real, however tangible they may seem, in the end, well, as Jesus said, of all earthly treasure, if moth and rust don't destroy, if thieves don't break in and steal, in the end, the great thief of death will rob you of every last vestige of these vain and empty hopes.
But if Jesus Christ did rise from the dead, then the pledge of his empty tomb can give us and must give us a certain hope for the future if we trust in him.
[19:29] And it's that hope, you see, that also transforms the present. It's a rebirth, says Peter, into a completely new perspective on life. A perspective that enables you to persevere even amid great struggle and sufferings, even against persecution.

Look at verse 8. Even though as yet we do not see him returned in all his glory to bring us glory, but we believe in him, and we rejoice therefore with joy that's inexpressible.
It's filled with glory. Why? Because, verse 9, we know that we are receiving and we will receive the outcome of our faith, the full salvation of our whole being that God has promised.
We know our hope is certain. We have a certain hope in the pledge of the empty tomb. A living hope of a true and eternal glory that is to come.
Do you open your Bibles again at 1 Peter and the summit, chapter 3. The pledge of the empty tomb is the blessing of certain hope.
[20:38] We have the living hope of glory to come in our resurrection to life everlasting. But in 1 Peter 3, verse 21, Peter points us to another wonderful pledge through Christ's resurrection.

And that is the blessing even now, even now, of cleansed hearts. We know that our hearts are already cleansed. We have the living peace of our guilt washed away through Jesus' resurrection and ascension to glory.
Let me read from the middle of verse 20 there. Peter says, 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.

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Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you. Not as the removal of dirt, filth from the body, the flesh, but as an appeal to God or as a pledge towards 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 subject to him.
The scholars argue there over whether what we read should be a appeal to God for a good conscience as the ESV has it or a pledge towards God as the NIV has it.
[22:10] But either way, the main focus is very clear. That this good conscience that we have, this clear conscience, verse 21, comes through the resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, what he's saying is that our whole salvation, which is represented in baptism, is as a result of Christ's resurrection. It is a washing of sorts, but not a bodily washing in the act of baptism, Peter says.
Rather, rather, baptism, he says, 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, Peter says, from all sin for everyone who puts their trust in Jesus Christ.
Now, you might remember Peter's opening words in chapter 1, verse 3, speaks of that sprinkling. True believers, he says, are chosen in the foreknowledge of God the Father by the sanctification of the Spirit for, literally, obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ.
Christian baptism is the outward expression of these twin facts, as the scholar Herb Marshall puts it, that God alone regenerates by His Spirit on the basis of the atonement that is wrought by Christ's blood alone, and also that you come committing yourself in faith and repentance, that is, in obedience to Christ as your Savior and Lord.
[23:56] 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 often think of it, isn't it?

Of course, it is through His death on the cross that we are rescued and that we are restored. We saw that on Good Friday. Peter's very clear about that. But what he's also very clear about here is that the cleansing of our hearts, 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, verse 21, through the resurrection.
But it is the pledge of that empty tomb, the resurrection of Jesus, that our hearts are fully cleansed, that we can have even now the living peace of a clear conscience before God, knowing that our sins have already been washed away completely, washed away forever.
But why through the resurrection? Well, Peter's alluding here to something that the writer of the Hebrews spells out and fleshes out in more detail.
And it'll help us if we turn there briefly to get that clear in our minds because it's a wonderful truth that we need to be very clear about. Turn back a few pages to Hebrews chapter 9.
[25:24] I think in the Church Visitors Bibles it's page 1006. Peter talks about obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ.

And when he does that he is speaking about people being bound to God as his covenant people in the new covenant, in the everlasting covenant, which is now everlasting because it's fulfilled finally and forever through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
But that language that he uses echoes the language of the old covenant, the old covenants of promise under Moses. And back in Exodus chapter 24 when God's people Israel are at Sinai, God binds them to him in that covenant, in obedience.
And they are sprinkled literally by the blood of the covenant. That is what cleanses them and sanctifies them, sets them apart as holy to God. So if you look at Hebrews chapter 9 at verse 18, the apostle says, Therefore, 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 is at Sinai, he took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.
[26:57] And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent, that's the tent of meeting, the tabernacle, 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.

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He's talking about the sprinkling with water and blood to purify a sinful people and the tabernacle, the place where God met with his people, cleansing them so that they might be able to be in God's presence and infillicence of the worshipper.
Only through what they promised would one day happen. The rituals of the old covenant law on their own and of themselves could never do that. That was obvious to all those people then of real faith because it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins, as Hebrews 10 verse 4 says.
Well, of course, they knew that. King David knew that. He expressed it in his great penitential psalm, Psalm 51. He knew that offerings and sacrifices, no matter what the numbers, could never cleanse him.
So he cried to God for the reality to which these things pointed and were there to point. God's promised cleansing of his heart by his Holy Spirit.
[28:15] And the whole of the Old Testament looked forward to that great day of fulfillment, the day of God's great salvation when at last he would intervene and deal with sin forever, the day of Christ.

And Christ did come at last. And his blood could and did cleanse from sin once and for all, forever. It's one of the great words of the book of Hebrews.
Look at Hebrews 9 verse 11. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then passing through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy place, the real holy place in heaven.
Not by means of the blood of goats and calves, 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 his blood purify our consciences from dead works to serve the living God?
You see, at last, a sprinkling that doesn't have to be repeated endlessly because it truly does purify the conscience forever.
[29:51] But I want you to notice when that everlasting cleansing is declared to be complete, look down to verse 23 of Hebrews 9. Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things, that's the earthly tabernacle, the temple, to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

For when Christ entered, sorry, for Christ has entered not into holy places made with hands, which are the copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.
You see what he's saying? The defilement of man's sin has tainted not just this earth, but it's made heaven itself filthy. The place of God's own eternal dwelling with his people is cleansed only when the risen Jesus appears in our place, in heaven, on our behalf, to sanctify heaven itself by the presence at last of perfect, purified, obedient humanity.
And that is why he can be a great high priest for us forever. Look down to chapter 10, verse 10. Do you see? 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.
That's Jesus' death, once for all. But if we read on, you see, when was that made complete and 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 where?
[32:02] At the right hand of God in glory, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made his footstool for his feet. For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

You see, Christ's cleansing and purifying, washing away of our sins, that which makes us holy at last in God's sight. It's completed in his resurrection, his ascension to be a priest forever, sat at God's right hand where his blood having once been shed, now and forever pleads peace for us.
By that power his saints forever shall stand. And that means stand justified in God's sight, justified from every stain, every stain on our guilty conscience is removed, is declared to be removed to the whole of heaven by the presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ in glory, in human flesh.
He was raised, as the apostle Paul says to the Roman, for our justification. Raised for our justification. Our consciences are sprinkled clean forever.

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They're purified through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Our hearts are cleansed forever of all of our sins, past and present and indeed sins future because Jesus Christ is risen today.
[33:38] That is the pledge of the empty tomb. That is the pledge and the promise today, right now, for the vilest offender who truly believes. We have the pledge of clean consciences.

Our hearts are cleansed forever because He is today in glory. And if that's something that doesn't thrill your heart on this Easter day, then I can only assume that you're much, much less of a sinner than I am.
But you're much less conscious of just how unclean your heart feels. Of how dismally we've failed the Lord.
Maybe you've never had to weep like Peter. Bitter tears of terrible denial. Terrible rejection of your Lord.
But if you have, as Peter had, then this pledge is so, so precious. That because He arose, we can be sure, utterly assured, that He has put away our sins once and for all.
[34:51] That He has sprinkled our hearts clean from an evil conscience. That He has forever washed us forever with pure water. We are holy in His sight.

God's love. And that means nothing can ever close the door of heaven to us. Not ever.
Nothing can stop our prayers coming to the throne of God. Nothing can stand as a bar to our presence and fellowship with our gracious Heavenly Father.
Nothing, says Paul, can separate us from His love. Not because we have attained, but because He arose.
And that's why these wonderful words that the Hebrews writer writes in chapter 10 and verse 19 are so truly wonderful.
[35:53] Let me read them as we close. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places that is heaven itself by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near 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 promised is faithful. We have a certain hope because we have cleansed hearts.
We have a living hope of glory to come in our resurrection to life everlasting. but we already have that living peace, the living peace of guilt washed away forever because He has risen, because He has ascended.
That's the pledge, that's the wonderful pledge of that empty tomb this Easter day. and that's why we must sing again, hallelujah, hallelujah, hearts to heaven and voices raised.
Almighty God, who through Thine only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, has overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech thee that by thy special grace enabling us, let us put into our minds good desires, so that by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect.
[37:53] Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with thee and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

and so may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Amen.

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