**RESURRECTION SUNDAY - LIVING HOPE**

Today we are celebrating Resurrection Sunday. The day that Jesus rose from the dead, after being crucified on a cross and buried in a tomb for three days.

Jesus DEATH & RESURRECTION – are the most important events in the History of the World. It was what the Son of God came to earth to accomplish, and neither the natural world or spiritual have been the same since.

**MATT 28:1-10**

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

**2**There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. **3**His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. **4**The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

**5**The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. **6**He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. **7**Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

**8**So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9**Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. **10**Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

**This is the *Resurrection of Jesus!***

***“Jesus rose from the dead!”***

***THE WORLD WAS CHANGED AND WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN!***

**Today: Millions of churches around the world are celebrating this event, reading the same scriptures and talking about the same thing.**

**I’m not sure any of us can *fully describe* the way the world changed in that moment.**

**When Jesus rose from the dead, something happened on earth and in heaven that transformed everything!**

**Until that moment, hopeless darkness permeated the earth…**

**When Jesus rose, *The curse was broken*!**

**Romans 6:9** Christ, *having been raised from the dead*, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion

***The world went from: Hopeless Darkness 🡪 To: LIVING HOPE***

The Resurrection is central to all we believe as Christians.

Despite the incredible *miracle* of Jesus’ birth, *(Christmas)*

and the enormous *significance* of the Crucifixion*, (Good Friday)*

If Jesus had not been raised from the dead, they would have *meant nothing.*

Even if Jesus lived the *life He lived*, and then *died on the cross*, without rising from the dead, he would have been considered a *very great man*, perhaps the *greatest man that ever lived*. His only flaw would have been that He *said* He would rise again, and *He failed.*

His life was so great that even if he never rose from the dead, some of His followers might’ve rationalized it away said; “well, He *Will* rise again someday”, or that He only meant that He would “*figuratively”* rise again, not literally.

But Jesus was quite literal when He claimed (several times) *“I will suffer, die, and rise from the dead”.*

When I present the gospel to unbelievers, this *particular fact*, the part about someone (Jesus) who had *actually died* and then *came back to life* is a little too much for some people to receive.

It sounds preposterous to the logical mind. The skeptic will say;

* maybe He never *fully died* on the cross,
* or maybe the apostles stole his body from the grave and then only “claimed” that they saw him and spoke with Him afterward, [Passover Plot]
* or maybe someone else who looked like Jesus stepped in as an imposter and fooled them all.

**Question: If He never rose again, if his resurrection story was all false, would it still make sense to follow Jesus here in the modern age?**

Well…, as a lifestyle alone, Christianity offers a good moral foundation for civilizations, it teaches ethics and morality and usually keeps people from killing each other, it actually encourages Love and charity.

So, even if the whole “literal Resurrection” thing is not even true, some would say that Christianity still has its merits.

The problem is that if the resurrection is not true, All of us who follow Jesus today and have ever lived and died for Him in history, are according to our own Bible considered; *“Useless and pitiful”.*

* 1 Cor. 15:14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.
* 1 Cor 15:19 “…we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.”

If Jesus *did not* literally rise from the dead, than everything else we believe falls completely apart.

**THE *HISTORICITY* OF JESUS’ RESURRECTION**

The information age has given birth to many theories and conjecture about things regarding faith and the Bible. With it is a renewed skepticism on the part of Atheists and others questioning whether Jesus ever existed, and even if he did, whether the Bible accounts about Him actually took place.

Author Lee Strobel the former legal editor of *The Chicago Tribune*, wrote a book called “The Case for Christ”. He began as an atheist who set out to disprove everything he could about Jesus. It backfired…He ended up becoming a strong believer and writing several books about his journey.

In his book “A Case for the Real Jesus”, he addresses the attacks on the veracity of the New Testament, especially with regard to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

He points out that *all* ancient historical accounts of every historical person are measured by certain common criteria to determine whether they are factual. The accounts with the most eye-witness and independent sources are said to be the most reliable. He, along with other scholars found that there are more reliable accounts of Jesus’ life, *including his death and resurrection* than there are of Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great, and many others who undoubted existed and shaped history (this is all according to the skeptic’s own criteria).

The **Apostle Paul** had a similar story.

He began as a highly educated and accomplished Religious Leader named Saul of Tarsus. He was *not* an eye-witness of the death and resurrection of Jesus, he wasn’t a believer then, yet when he heard about, and read the accounts of Jesus life, death and resurrection, he completely turned away from his comfortable safe life as a Pharisee and spent his remaining years being beaten, imprisoned and eventually *decapitated* to propagate the truth about Jesus that he once swore was false. He and those around him would never do this for a myth.

His experience was not just academic, it was more. He did not just *learn about* the recent history of Jesus’ resurrection and believe it as fact. He EXPERIENCED it through an *encounter with Jesus*, AND RECEIVED IT AS TRUTH.

He was “filled” with the *Spirit of God, the same spirit* who raised *Jesus from the dead.*

He writes:

Romans 8:11

**11 “**The Spirit of God, who *raised Jesus from the dead*, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will *give life* to your mortal bodies by this same *Spirit living within you*.”

The Resurrection did not just cause Paul to “switch religions”, he was *given life by the Spirit* and he tells us here that we can experience that too.

He was completely transformed from being;

* Mean-spirited, 🡪 to Kind-hearted
* Pride-centered, 🡪 to Christ-centered
* Selfish, 🡪 to Sacrificial
* Lead by evil to do awful things, --> filled with God’s Spirit to do great things!

He went from executing Christians for blasphemy, to being the principal writer of the New Testament and what we know as *Christian doctrine* today.

He stopped enforcing the law that says “*kill for blasphemy*” to writing scripture that says*; “love is patient, love is kind…”*

As a historian, He was more of an authority on Judaism, Roman History and 1st century writings than anyone alive today, so he could have lived and died as the worse skeptic of Christianity ever, yet he believed the gospel of Jesus Christ when he heard it from common men and women, every word of it. He was willing to commit his whole life to it and even died for it.

The **Apostle Peter** believed as well.

Other than the fact that he was Jewish, He was much different than Paul.

He was a fisherman in Capernaum and was no scholar.

He met Jesus while he was fishing in Galilee and was transformed from *an uneducated inarticulate commoner*, to the *most prominent Teacher, Leader and Speaker* of the early church.

He *also* gave his life for the belief that Jesus literally “rose from the dead” he wouldn’t back down on that claim. According to tradition, He was eventually crucified upside down.

But before he died, he wrote something very important about the resurrection that we need to listen to today.

1 Peter 1:3 **“**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a **living hope** *through the resurrection of Jesus Chris*t from the dead,

“Living Hope through The Resurrection” – *(That’s why this day is so important.)*

WHAT IS LIVING HOPE?

Living Hope is the Hope of Glory, that we experience right here in the “land of the living” and it continues into eternity when we die.

“***Living hope****through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”*

gives us the ability to have hope in any circumstance regardless of what we face. Knowing that not only is heaven promised to us when we die, but God’s spirit is right here with us to guide us, encourage us, strengthen us and comfort us. In the toughest times we face.

That means that *regardless of the terrible things* we experience in this world, *Because of the Resurrection,* we have, *not just “hope*”, but “*Living Hope*”!

**Hope** – “confident expectation of what **God** has promised”

“Living Hope” means:

* strength in our weakness,
* encouragement in our darkest times
* victory that goes beyond the grave.
* Deep Joy and even happiness despite the tough struggles that we face in this world.

**John 16:33** **“**These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Jesus promised: “In this world YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION…”

How many of you feel that today?

I know this feeling very well. My life has not always been marked by easy and pleasant circumstances. In fact it’s usually not that way.

This past year is particularly rough.

I’ve seen many friends and love ones pass away, including my young nephew Thomas who overdosed on OxyContin only 5 months ago.

Many of you have had to say goodbye to dear friends and loved ones, even this week.

Last year on Easter, I spoke about certain people who I am close with who were experiencing the “Living Hope” in their lives regardless of the deep hardships they have faced along the way.

One of them was *Joy Vanderhoof.*

Joy was the most faithful friend and congregant any Pastor could ever ask for. The most active volunteer, the biggest supporter, always encouraging, always serving, always helping. The first to arrive and last to leave at every church function. When I met her, she had very few family members to begin with yet within a short period of time not too long ago, they all died. She was left with no family - no spouse, no parents, no siblings, no children, she was devastated at the loss of her husband and mother in recent years, but as she gave all of herself to completely trusting in God and experiencing the healing power of Jesus, *She radiated with deep contentment, fulfilment and JOY, like very few others you will ever meet, all because of the “Living Hope” she was experiencing through Jesus.*

Less than four months after that sermon, I shockingly watched her slip into eternity in a hospital room as she was suddenly taken ill and died.

I couldn’t understand. Why would God take her, just when she was experiencing the highest point of life, fulfillment and joy that I’d ever seen anyone have?

Then it occurred to me, what she was experiencing here on earth was good, even great, but what she is experiencing now and throughout eternity**, is even better.**

**1 Cor. 2:9** “"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" -- the things God has prepared for those who love him.”

[NRF trailer story – renovating 8-plex movie theater for our church in Franklin, TN]

* + - Offices would not be ready for a few months.
    - Rented a temporary “construction Trailer” for Church office
    - It was small. Crowded and cluttered. (Me, Sec., Admin. Youth Pastor)
    - It was placed outside the building in a muddy area, so the carpets were always dirty.
    - In fact, the whole thing was always dirty and ugly, but it was cheap.
    - I swore that it was unlevel, because everything seemed crooked.
    - It also had a musty mold smell that got worse every day.
    - The only saving grace about working in that trailer…
    - Is that we knew it was TEMPORARY, we had a big beautiful building with a wonderful auditorium and beautiful office space being prepared for us. Where we were was Temporary.

This is how it is for us as believers. Jesus said that *I go and prepare a place for you* that *where I am, you may also be*.

Friends, the whole world is experiencing tribulation right now. Some are holding on to the hope that it’s just temporary, that soon things will be back to relative normalcy.

But I tell you that even regular life as we know it is temporary. We are created for eternity, so nothing we try to cling to in this life will last, only that which is eternal.

**2 Cor. 4:17-18**”For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, **18**while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.”

Things that seem so important to us and our lifestyle have currently been stripped away:

Time with our extended family,

Some of our jobs,

Financial security,

Music and Sporting events,

Travel and Vacations,

Even church gatherings

Then to *add to the current misery*, we also;

Have to change the way we live, eat, shop, exercise, work and go to school.

We can’t interact with others like we’d like to, for fear that we can get sick and die, or pass a virus to someone else who could.

In addition, we are hearing grave reports on the news of people dieing alone, and watching loved ones get sick all around us, or hear reports of those we love or friends of friends dying all around us.

(I have heard of more deaths of *people I know* this month, than any other month I can remember, and it’s not even half over yet,. )

But I have to tell you, that I have not lost hope, in fact I’ve gained it.

I have *not* fallen into despair, in fact I am *eagerly awaiting* what God will do in these strange times.

I am surrounded by people who *trust in God*, and *have faith in His promises*, so I am *greatly encouraged* in these tough days.

WHY?

Are we all just foolish, naive and brainwashed?

Are we all in denial, just covering up our deep fears by believing a fairy tales of false hopes?

NOPE!

No, because we trust in the Lord.

* We trust in the everlasting truth of God’s word.   
  We trust that regardless of what we face, He is with us and will never leave us or forsake us.
* We trust that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, lives in us, the power of the Resurrection.

And because of the resurrection, (*Jesus being raised from the dead*), we have LIVING HOPE for this life, and the HOPE OF GLORY for the life to come.

**Closing:**

1st Peter 1:3-6 ”Let us thank the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was through His loving-kindness that we were born again to a new life and have a hope that never dies. This *living hope* is ours because Jesus was raised from the dead. **4**We will receive the great things that we have been promised. They are being kept safe in heaven for us. They are pure and will not pass away. They will never be lost. **5**You are being kept by the power of God because you put your trust in Him and you will be saved from the punishment of sin at the end of the world. **6**With this hope you can be happy even if you need to have sorrow and all kinds of tests for a while.”

My prayer is that you experience the living hope that never dies, so that you can be happy regardless of what you face, both in this life and in the life to come.