

**Christianityworks**  
**The Passover Blessing**  
**055-4**  
**Wake Up to a New Life**

If God is God – if He loves us the way the Bible says He does, then hope for us would be very high on His list, wouldn't it? Because the last thing He'd want is for us to experience hopelessness.

**Did it really Happen?**

Over these last few weeks we have been looking at Easter and again, we will be doing that this week. And you may be thinking, 'Berni, Easter is well and truly done and dusted. Why are you still hanging around talking about Easter?' Well, that may well be but it wasn't done and dusted that first Easter. In these weeks after that first Easter, people were still trying to figure out what in the blazes was going on? 'Is He really alive? Surely not – but Fred said he'd seen Him.' There are rumours and appearances. Is He alive or not?

And that's an important question because the Apostle Paul wrote later on in First Corinthians chapter 15, verse 17: "*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*" We have been talking about the fact that Easter was all about setting us free to live a new life – free from the slavery to our sins and guilt and all that stuff. And so many people find it harder, in fact, to believe that they could ever have a new life, than that Jesus actually rose from the dead.

So that's what we are going to look at today. Did He really rise from the dead and can I really....really have a new life when I put my faith in that fact? Let's face it: crucified and then alive? It's pretty hard to believe, yea? What's the proof? What's the evidence? I mean, if we look at it like sane, rational people, can you really come to the conclusion that Jesus died and rose again? And if so what does it mean to you and me, here and now? Can we have a new life?

Well, let's step into Jerusalem; into those days and weeks that followed the death and the alleged resurrection of Jesus and just look at some of what happened. The rest is up to each one of us – you and me – to make up our own minds. Okay, let's start with the facts – this whole Jesus crucifixion thing is no mystery. Jesus became very popular; the guy made sense; people flocked to hear Him speak and the religious leaders of the day – they seriously got their noses out of joint – and they plotted to kill Jesus. They

whipped up the crowd and Pontius Pilot, ultimately ordered Him to be crucified.

He was dead – there is no doubt about that. No serious historian would dispute it so far. Probably none of us would have any difficulty with that story, thus far. But then comes the whole story of the resurrection of Jesus. They crucified Him, they took His body down and put it in a tomb, they rolled a stone in front of the tomb and put some Roman soldiers guarding it. And then, Easter Sunday, as we call it these days, all of a sudden, the stone was rolled back – the tomb was empty.

Now what we have is a resurrection mystery. What happened to the body? Alright, let's think that through for just a minute. What are the options? The first one is that the Roman authorities or the religious leaders took the body and hid it. Now, that may have been but it just wasn't in their interest to do that. Jesus had been predicting His own resurrection – why would they open up that possibility by taking and hiding His body?

The other option is that Jesus followers stole the body and created that rumour but there are just a few things that work against that theory. The first one is the fact of security. If you have a look at Matthew chapter 27, verses 62 to 66:

*"The next day, the one after the preparation day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilot. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while He was still alive, that this deceiver said, "After three days I will rise again." So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day, otherwise, His disciples may come and steal the body and then tell the people that He has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first. "Take a guard," Pilot answered, "go and make the tomb as secure as you know how. So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting their guard."*

So, these disciples didn't have much chance to go and rob the body because it was in a cave with a dirty great stone in front of it and some Roman soldiers and there was a seal on the stone. The second thing is the state of mind of the disciples. These men were in disarray; they were in a daze. If you read any of the accounts – Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, they didn't believe this stuff about the resurrection. It was a brutal, fearsome crucifixion and Jesus had told them about the resurrection, but it didn't even enter their heads. In any case, you have the security problem.

And you know these disciples all went on to die the deaths of martyrs because they had been going around proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. One by one, over the next thirty or forty years, each one of them was put to death for their faith in this risen Jesus. Now, let me ask you something – would they have done that for something they knew to be a lie? Not likely!

So the only other possibility that remains open to me is that Jesus actually rose again from the dead. And in fact, Paul writes in First Corinthians chapter 15, verse 6, that He appeared to well over five hundred people. Now that's a huge percentage of the people that were in Jerusalem. That's like two or three percent and remember these accounts of Jesus rising from the dead – they were written when many of the people to whom He is alleged to have appeared, were still alive. They could testify to the truth or otherwise of any such claim.

There was account after historical account written, that Jesus rose again from the dead; that He appeared to people. For me, it's not that hard to believe the evidence. What's hard to believe is that God would actually do something like this – bring Jesus back to life!

The truth is, I'm not that sure I can convince anybody. We can't have a coroner's inquest to look at the evidence for the resurrection today because the people who were there aren't there anymore. What I can do is encourage you to do this: read the accounts for yourself – the last few chapters of the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. I guess it will take you about half an hour, maybe forty five minutes.

Make up your own mind in your own heart once and for all. Maybe you can pray God, 'If this is true, do something in me and show me. Do something in my heart and put a certain faith in me that will never waver.' For me, you know, I'm a pretty rational kind of IT consultant type of person – with everything I am, I believe in my heart that Jesus rose from the dead.

Romans chapter 10, verse 9 says: *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."* It's that important! Take the time, turn it over, draw your own conclusions – believe in your heart. If Jesus is alive, what does that mean to us; to you and me, today? We are going to take a look at that next.

## **A New Life Today**

I'm not sure where you are in terms of believing in Jesus and in particular, His resurrection. But let's assume for a moment - just humour me - that He did rise from the dead. That's certainly where I'm at - it's kind of at the centre of what I believe. Well, if He did rise from the dead, what does that mean to you and me, here and now? What relevance is there in all of that? Can the resurrection of Jesus Christ have an impact on your life and mine today?

They're good questions! I mean, why a resurrection at all - why did God plan it that way? And why did He make it central to believing in Jesus? You know, for the Apostle Paul, it was absolutely essential. Without faith in that he said, there's just no point. Romans chapter 10, verse 9 says that: "*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved.*" And again, Paul writes in First Corinthians 15:17 (we saw this earlier), "*If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is futile.*"

Okay, that's the theology, if you like - let's just take that at face value. But why is it so important - why does God put it right at the centre of believing in Jesus - of having eternal life? See, I'm this pesky kind of bloke - I keep asking these questions and the reason is that people never really explained this stuff to me in terms that I could understand. All these Christians were talking about this whole resurrection thing, like it is really important. Great, but why?

Believing in Jesus, for me - it's a process - it's a whole life long thing. At some point you take a step of faith to believe in Him but what I discovered, was that there were lots of different parts of my life that didn't fit with who Jesus is: selfishness, anger, I was judgemental. All that stuff stunted my life. It's crazy how we want to hang onto that rubbish for dear life but we do and it turns out, it's robbing us of life. I mean, I used to spend most of my time being angry with people because they didn't measure up to my standards - they didn't see the world the way I did. Instead of peace and joy, I always had anger and resentment in my heart.

It's not rocket science, is it? It's one thing to believe with our heads and our hearts in Jesus but it's quite another to believe with our lives. To do that requires change and that's where the resurrection comes in. The Apostle Paul wrote this - if you've got a Bible, open it up - Romans chapter 8, verse 11. Just have a listen to this short verse. Paul writes: "*If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through His Spirit that dwells in you.*"

Let's unpack that for a bit. Jesus dies; He's crucified; He's paid for our sins. And the word 'sin' in the New Testament literally means 'missing the point'. So we miss the whole point; we turn our backs on God and the death of Jesus pays for our sins. God is loving but He is just. We have all fallen short so we believe that Jesus died for us and the slate is wiped clean – we are forgiven; we have a fresh start. That's fantastic! Lots of people believe that, it just doesn't seem to make a real difference in their lives.

But you and I know that getting rid of the rubbish that God calls 'sin' is a lifelong process. Come on! We are naturally selfish; someone does us wrong somehow and we want to be angry and we want to have revenge and to pay them back and Jesus turns around and says, "You want to believe in Me with your life? Good, show Me! Go and pray for your enemy, in fact, go and love your enemy.'

I don't know about you, but that way of living just doesn't come naturally to me. It's a process of changing but changing those things is hard; very hard and in fact, in some areas, downright impossible. We just want to hang on and hang on and hang on to that stuff and let it poison us. Paul bemoans that very thing in Romans chapter 7. He kind of says, look, I can know what is right. I can want to do what's right; I just can't seem to be able to do it. Who will rescue me from this body of sin and death? And the answer is, Paul says, Jesus Christ!

See, the resurrection is about having a new life and a new life involves learning to live again. Believing in the resurrection is about putting the old person inside us, down with Jesus on the cross. But now.....now we can have a new life, a resurrection life. *"If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal body through the Spirit that dwells in you."*

The resurrection – believing in that – is about bringing life back into our bodies, colour into our cheeks. How many people need that in their lives today? How many people are looking for that in all sorts of strange places? See, this isn't some theory – this is actuality. The same Holy Spirit who breathed life back into Jesus dead body, breathes life back into us by giving us victory of the sin of humanity. He breathes life back into our bodies. We have victory over our sin.

Come on, this is great stuff! This is a great plan – this is resurrection living here and now. You and I so often, we are afraid that if we are going to throw our whole lives at Jesus' feet: 'Oh no, what's that going to cost me? What will I have to give up?' The answer is this – only the rubbish that is ruining your life. And my experience is that He's never ask me to give up something

that's better than knowing Him; better than having His joy; better than having His peace – ever. That's what a new life is all about!

### **A Certain Hope for Tomorrow**

Have you ever been in a place where you have lost all hope? Hope, as it turns out, is a precious, precious commodity. We all need things in our lives to look forward to – to hope in – the deep sense that, 'I have a future; I know where I am going.' When there is no future, it is tragic. When you lose all hope, well, it feels like life is over. And that's the problem with death – we all die at some point – some die young, others watch their bodies progressively, give up the ghost.

And if God is God and He loves us the way the Bible says He does, then hope, for us, will be very high on His list, wouldn't it? Because the last thing He'd want is for us to experience hopelessness. And it turns out that hope is very high on His list. That's what this whole resurrection thing is all about. It's a funny thing – when things are going badly in our lives, hope evaporates very quickly.

I mean, look at the twelve disciples. Over and over again Jesus told them that He would be crucified and rise again – over and over. And when it happens, they forget that – they are scattered to the four winds – they desert Him and they completely lose sight of His promise; the resurrection. And actually most of them needed convincing that it had actually happened.

They're just like us. Life takes a turn for the worse and the first thing to go out the window is hope. It's kind of natural. First Chronicles 29, verse 15 says: "*Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.*" Let me get right in your face for a bit because we need some teaching on hope. When we put our trust in Jesus in the good times; when we lay our lives down, we love Him, we adore Him, we worship Him, we follow Him with our lives – I'll tell you what happens: it prepares us for when the storm clouds roll in. Something strange and new and wonderful happens in our hearts – this light of hope shines and it won't go out.

The Apostle Peter writes this in First Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 3:

*"Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for us who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In*

*this we rejoice, even though for now, for a little while, we have had to suffer various trials."*

The people who Peter was writing to – they were going through serious trials – they were being persecuted and tortured and killed for their faith. Over and over again the New Testament talks like this: 'being the first born among the dead' – in other words it points back to the resurrection – the historical fact that death couldn't hold Jesus down. And when we put our trust in Him, that's what we put our hope in. Put all your hope into the resurrection of Jesus Christ – it's a living hope; it's a new birth into something that's alive.

See, our problem is that we spend so much of our time hoping in.....in the next pay rise or in some temporal bauble here on earth. Come on, we do! And we lose sight of the living hope that we have through Jesus Christ. Listen to what Peter said again: *"By His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading."* That is worth hoping in! Eternal life is worth hoping in! It is rock solid and you know what the basis of the promise is? The resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Let's take a look at your life for a moment – the things that aren't going well for you, the things that you may want to change – the reality is, there are some of them that we can't change. Maybe God will change them, maybe He won't – I don't know. But in the meantime, He wants us to live a life of certain hope.

Now if you want to compare anything I can have here on earth, here and now, with the certain hope of life with Jesus Christ, I don't reckon there is any comparison. You see, John gives us a glimpse into what's going on here....he gives us a glimpse in Revelation chapter 21. This is what he writes – it's a glimpse into heaven:

*"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City; the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Now the dwelling place of God is with men and He will live with them. They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

That's where it ends and the end is the beginning of an eternity. Nothing else comes close to that and the resurrection is a believable, historical event that we can hope in - the fact that Jesus rose again from the dead - the first born from among the dead.

We wander around in the weeds, down in the murky mire but the resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's call to set our eyes, our hearts, everything we are - all our hope on heavenly things because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let me share with you what Paul writes, as we close, from Colossians chapter 3, verse 1: *"So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on this earth for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."*

That's the message of Easter! The message of Easter doesn't end with Jesus on the cross. It doesn't end with Jesus dead in a tomb. It ends with the stone rolled away, with the tomb empty and with Jesus walking around alive - saying there's a new life, a new future and God calls us to put our hope in that.

It is time to start living life from that perspective. Not looking at all the things in front of our eyes and all the horrible things: recessions and there are wars and there is not enough food - we go through those things. Believe you me, plenty of people listening to this programme right now, who are living in war zones but God is saying:

'Look, wake up! I sent you My Son, He died for you. He rose again; He ascended into heaven - that's your future. And it's a future that begins today. You can have this new resurrected life today. You can have the power of My Holy Spirit in your body to give you life - to take away the things that cause you hurt. Live this beautiful, wonderful life, beginning now and then no matter what this world throws at you, you will have a joy, you will have a hope that is certain because you will know that your future is in the living hope - the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead in the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading.'

That's the point and that's why we are talking about Easter.