

Are You Hopeless?

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[0 : 0 0] Today is Easter Sunday, that day when we remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's a day where Christians have gathered throughout the world to mark the fact that Jesus has indeed risen.

That's a core belief of the Christian faith that almost 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ was crucified on a Friday and there he died, but on the following Sunday he rose again.

And we believe as Christians that today he is still alive. He is in heaven with God the Father ruling over the universe and transforming people's lives all over the world.

And for us as Christians, for every Christian in here, we can say that Jesus has transformed our lives in an absolutely amazing way.

And every Sunday, since that day when Jesus rose, Christians have gathered together to worship him. It is a core truth of the Christian faith.

[1 : 1 1] But for many people, and maybe even for you, it can all seem unbelievable. And that's been our theme over the past three weeks.

And tonight we are concluding this week's series by asking the question, are you hopeless? Or maybe we could ask it in a different way. We could say, well, are you hopeful?

Or we could ask, what are you hoping for? And when I say that, I don't just mean in terms of what you hope for this week or what you hope for in terms of your job or what you hope for in terms of relationships in your life or in terms of experiences that you get.

But what about in terms of life and death? Do you have hope?

Have you ever even thought about it? Not that long ago, Christianity was very believable to the people of Scotland.

[2 : 1 9] Maybe not to everybody, but certainly to many. Today it's not like that. Christianity is becoming more and more a minority worldview in Scotland.

Scotland is now statistically classified as an unchurched nation. And people actually come to Scotland, are coming to Scotland every year in order to learn what it's like to live in a post-Christian nation.

Other worldviews have kind of forced Christianity out of its place in Scotland.

These other worldviews have kind of challenged Christianity and forced it into a corner. A good example of that is humanism.

In many ways, humanism and Christianity are kind of put against each other. And looking at it from a distance, you'd probably say, well, it's humanism that's winning.

[3 : 2 5] Humanist weddings are going up. Church weddings, maybe not so much. In many ways, humanism seems to be new and fresh and appealing.

Christianity is old and weird in people's eyes. And looking at this, I don't want to spend too much time on this, and I definitely don't want to denigrate humanism.

I do want to ask the question, what's the difference between humanism and Christianity? As I said, these things are often pitted against each other as though they're completely different.

What is the difference? Well, it's a really interesting question to ask because there's actually a lot of similarities between these two worldviews. So humanism has a deep sense of concern for others. So too does Christianity. And that's why both of these worldviews will still inspire amazing charity work across Scotland.

[4 : 2 8] Humanism is deeply committed to human rights. So too is Christianity. If you know your history well, then you'll know that it was the Christian church that transformed the status of women and the status of slaves, both in the ancient world and in the modern era.

Here's a really fun fact for you. Women in the UK were given the right to vote to choose their MPs in 1918.

So you women, 1918, that's when you got the right to choose who your MP was. Do you know when women in Scotland were given the right to vote to choose who their minister was?

1846, in the Free Church of Scotland. I bet you weren't expecting that. We're not as backward as they may think.

We're hugely committed to rights and to equality. Humanism is committed to the arts. Whether it or not, so is Christianity. So in this past week, the world was horrified to see Notre Dame Cathedral go up in flames.

[5 : 52] It's an absolutely iconic work of art. Who built it? The humanists or the Christians? And even here, in a purpose-built free church, free church, the kind of dullest of the dull, look at this building.

It's a stunning work of art. Humanism is committed to science and reason. And despite what people think, so too is Christianity.

As Christians, we marvel at what science discovers. We place a huge emphasis on our minds. If you read through the New Testament, you will discover that again and again and again you are being told to think.

So between these two worldviews, humanism and Christianity, there's a lot of common ground. And while I deeply regret the atheism that lies at the heart of the humanists, worldview, there's still a lot we can agree on.

So what's the difference? The difference is that Christianity will give you hope.

[7 : 08] And if you are needing hope, then it's Christianity that you need. I want us just to unpack that a wee bit together for a moment, because a lot of people assume that hope and reason can't go together.

And so the big problem that people have with Christianity is they say that it's based on blind faith. It's just kind of a vague optimism. It's irrational belief.

And for many people, it's more like a fairy tale. And many people will think that that reason and the kind of hope that Christianity talks about can't really go together.

Is that true? Well, I don't think it's true at all. And it is most definitely not true to say that Christianity is based on blind faith.

The truth is Christianity is grounded, absolutely grounded on clear, logical, coherent reasoning.

[8 : 18] Mindless Christianity is not Christianity at all. And at the heart of Christianity, there is a core principle of reasoning. It's a very, very simple principle, but it's a principle that lies at the heart of logic.

It's the principle of if, then. That's a basic logical relationship.

And it's actually something that we see all around us. If something is true, then a certain conclusion can follow. So you can look at all sorts of real life examples.

So if I tap this lectern, it will make a noise. If I tap it, then it will make a noise. There you go. If I gave all of you five pounds, then you would all be richer.

If Hibbs won the league, then Derrick would be happy. No, sorry. Actually, I said I would give real life examples. Sorry. Apologies. The key point is that hope, hope is grounded on the principle of if, then.

[9 : 38] So if a father can get his wife and children out of Syria, then there's hope that they'll be safer.

When someone has a cardiac arrest, if you get them a defibrillator, then there is hope of saving them. When you are diagnosed with cancer, if there's the option of surgery or treatment, then there is hope of recovery.

None of these are blind hopes. They're completely logical. If something is true, then we can expect certain things.

And it's important to remember that if the if changes, then the then changes too. I hope that makes sense. So for example, once there was no hope for somebody who had a cardiac arrest.

If they had a cardiac arrest, they were finished. But now the if is different because the invention of the defibrillator means that if you use it, then the then is different.

[10 : 46] It's no longer hopeless. There's a great chance of recovery. Hope is grounded on the principle of if, then.

And the key point is that Christianity is exactly the same. The Bible speaks in these very terms. Jesus, when he was healing people from the power of sin on their lives, when he was helping those who were demon possessed and whose lives were just chaotic because of the power of sin, people were accusing him and saying, well, you're just able to cast out these demons because you're demonic yourself.

And he said, no, he said, if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then something amazing has happened. The kingdom of God has come upon you.

The early Christian leaders spoke in exactly the same way. Paul said, if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, meaning that you are part of the promised people that ran right through the historical narrative of the Bible.

[11:59] John says the same thing in one of his letters. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

And supremely, this principle of if, then, applies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If the resurrection is not true, then Christianity is wrong.

The Bible itself says that if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

But if the resurrection is true, then everything changes.

And even if you've never believed in the resurrection before, please just think about it for a moment. If that really happened, then that changes the world.

[13:09] Now, you might say, well, that's a big if. It seems like an impossible if, but it's not impossible. And a big if is absolutely not an impossible if.

I often think to myself, if you imagine speaking to somebody 500 years ago and said to them, do you know that in 500 years time, there will be people in the world who can gather up a few bits of stuff from the ground.

They'll be able to pick up some metal and some minerals and some liquid out of the ground. They'll have to dig it up. If they process it a wee bit and if they arrange it together in a certain order, they'll be able to put it into a wee rectangular shape, small enough to fit in your pocket, and you will be able to take it out and communicate with anybody in the world instantaneously.

You'd say, that's ridiculous. And yet there it is.

A big if is not an impossible if. Lots of remarkable ifs have actually happened. And the most remarkable of all is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[14:23] And that resurrection is a unique, attested historical event. It's historical in that it took place at a certain moment in history.

It's attested in that people witnessed it and that I witnessed testimony has been preserved. And it is unique in the sense that it is a one of a once in an eternity event.

And in terms of recording the truth of a unique event 2000 years ago, Christianity actually provides all the evidence that you could reasonably expect.

So was the tomb empty? Yes it was. Did the risen Jesus appear to people? Yes he did. Were there lots of witnesses? Yes there were.

Was there testimony preserved? Yes it was. That's why the real question is not is there evidence? The real question is are you willing to believe the evidence?

[15:25] And that's perhaps the greatest challenge of all. Thinking to yourself well is it really possible? Is it really believable that Jesus could rise from the dead?

Well in order for you to believe that evidence, all Christianity is asking you to do is to take a step back and to have a much bigger perspective on reality.

And this is something that's really important for us to do. I want you just to take a step back and to think about how you view reality, how you view the world, the universe, time, life, all of these things. So here you are. This is you, the we stick man, standing in this big thing called reality.

And we exist in this big sequence of past, present and future. Whatever you are, you are part of that process.

[16:33] And I think there's an origin, whatever that was. Now there's a reality that you live in whatever that is. And ahead of you is a destiny, ahead of you is a future.

And I think that most people in Scotland today, whatever their beliefs will agree that we exist as those who live in an amazing, dying world.

We live in an amazing, dying world. That's why half of it is grey. It's amazing because all around us there's life and beauty and order and power and splendor.

It's dying because it's all slowly fading away. So whether it's the billions of stars in the universe or the billions of people on this planet, everything's dying.

And most people today I think would recognize that the dyingness is more powerful than the amazingness.

[17 : 56] Our worlds a dying world and we are a dying people. And many people today will say that's pretty much it.

And they'll view the world as existing in this self-contained box and within that box everything is slowly dying.

And so in terms of our origin, our origin is nothing. The reality is dying. Our destiny is nothing.

And looking at that box, you have to ask the question, why is it dying? What is death?

And some people might say, well, death is just inevitable. Others might say it's natural. Some might even say it's desirable. Death is just an integral part of that box that reality exists in.

[19 : 02] That's why everything is dying. It's just the way it is. The Bible says something very, very different about death.

According to the Bible, death is not inevitable or natural or desirable. According to the Bible, death is an enemy.

And in order to see that, you need to have a much bigger perspective on reality because the world is not existing in a self-contained box that comes from nothing.

The world is the creation of God himself. He is the self-sufficient, life-giving absolute of the universe. He is the one who's created a world and a universe that is intended to live.

It's a living world that he's made from the life-giving God who has life in and of himself. And at the heart of that is humanity created to live for God in a world made to be our home.

[20 : 13] And the reason that reality for us now is that humanity and the world around us is dying. It's not because God failed in making a living world.

It's because we pushed him away and we have rebelled against what he intended for us. If you pick up your bulletins, if you've got the notice sheet in front of you, you can see the question from the New City Catechism that we read out in the morning which speaks about this.

It's asked the question, what is sin? Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, rebelling against him by living without reference to him, not being or doing what he requires in his law, resulting in what?

Our death and the disintegration of all creation. That's why the world is now dying.

And so the biblical perspective tells you a bigger story. It tells you that the origin is living, is that we are meant to be living, but the current reality is dying. But the destiny is restoration.

[21 : 27] That the God who gave life in the beginning is going to restore life once again. That according to the Bible is the great destiny of humanity and of the universe, that the world around us, the created universe and humanity within that will be restored to what it's intended to be.

Everything will be put right. And everything that is dying, everything that results in death is going to be outside that new creation.

And in terms of finding hope in face of death, this is where we discover that Christianity's objective is way, way bigger than what we hope for ourselves.

Because our aim in this amazing dying world in which we live is to prevent death, isn't it? So we try to be healthy. We pour our resources into medical research.

We have an amazing health service that we value so much and that we regard as so important. We train ourselves in first aid. We do everything that we can. We pour huge amounts of effort into trying to prevent death, because life is amazing and we don't want to lose it.

[22 : 54] We strive to prevent death. But Christianity's aim is not to prevent death.

Christianity's aim is to reverse death. And that's why at the heart of Christianity is a key moment in space and time when death was reversed.

That moment is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if that resurrection has happened, then you can have hope.

And that's exactly what we read about in the passage from the Bible we read in 1 Peter. He says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He's caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The resurrection gives us a living hope, a real hope, a hope of life in the midst of a dying world. The God who gives life has come to restore life through God the Son Himself, Jesus Christ, and His death and resurrection.

[24 : 29] And it all makes perfect sense. Because if you think of cancer, for a long time that word seemed like a death sentence to anyone who got it.

A cancer diagnosis means you're finished. And it seemed like the worst news that anyone could get.

But the first cancer survivor gives everyone else hope.

So if death is like a cancer that has spread to every single human, then if there was a death cancer survivor, if there was someone who could beat that disease, who could beat that enemy, then the rest of us could have hope.

Just imagine if that was true. Imagine if there was somebody who actually beat death, who was subjected to all the power of that brutal, intrusive, hideous enemy of life, that horrible, inescapable cancer.

[25 : 36] They were exposed to it all, and yet they beat it. Imagine if that was true. Someone beat death by rising again. And then it was the case that everybody else had the opportunity to share in that victory, to share in that recovery, and to have hope that the benefits of that first survivor could be applied to everybody else who has the same illness.

Imagine that was true. Imagine that there was a death cancer survivor. The resurrection tells you that it is true.

And that's why Christianity is good news. That's why it is such good news, because if the resurrection happened, then we now can have the most amazing hope.

We live in an amazing, dying world. Everyone thinks that the dyingness is more powerful than the amazingness Christianity says, no, it isn't.

And it's all grounded on that great principle of if and then. It's not blind faith. It's not vague optimism. It's not kind of airy, fairy nonsense. It's logic.

[26 : 58] If, then, if Jesus rose from the dead, then everything changes, and you can have hope.

But what does that hope look like? It's a way of a vague word. What do we mean when we talk about hope? Well, to see what it looks like, we can go back to 1 Peter and especially to verse 4.

And I want to look just very, very briefly at four key words that appear in verse 4. Here describes our hope as an inheritance, being born again to our living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance.

Now that's a brilliant word, because it immediately speaks of a family relationship. Inheritance is a child receiving something from their father.

And it's pointing us to that family relationship that is at the core of what the Christian church is. And it's reminding us of the amazingly privileged status that we can now have as Christians.

[28 : 18] So if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, you have this extraordinary new status. The key point, if you think about inheritance, is that in order to receive it, you need to be something.

So if you have a disputed inheritance claim, these things are resolved by determining who the person is, if they really are a child of this person who's left an inheritance.

We are granted this inheritance because of what we now are as Christians. And what are we? We're children of God. That's what you become if you become a Christian. You become part of God's family.

That's how Christianity works. The Bible calls us to put our faith in Jesus Christ. And that faith unites us to Jesus.

[29 : 22] So He becomes our brother. And God, the Father who is His Father, becomes our Father. As believers, we become part of God's family, and all the privileges of being a child of God now belong to us.

And that's why if you think about your destiny, if you think about your future, if you become a Christian or if you are a Christian, then you have a right to take your place in God's house.

That's why when Jesus said when he was returning to heaven after his resurrection, he says, I'm going to go to prepare a place for all of my people. And the reason he did that is because we belong there.

It's where we belong. When you get to heaven, you will not be an outsider. You won't be on the fringes.

You won't be out of place. So often we can feel really out of place at times. We can feel on the fringes of peer groups or colleagues or whatever. We feel like we're on the outside. You'll never, ever feel like that in heaven because it's where you belong.

[30 : 47] When Peter wrote to the Christians at the start of this letter, he described them as exiles. That's because that's what they were.

But when they died and went to heaven, they stopped being exiles because they were home. That word inheritance is amazing. It's reminding us that that's where we belong as part of God's family.

And then after inheritance, Peter uses three little, well, not little, big words, I suppose, three adjectives that describe that inheritance in a wee bit more detail.

First is that it's imperishable. That word simply means that it's not subject to death or decay. So our inheritance as Christians is utterly immune and exempt from the power of death and sin.

[31 : 48] That's astonishing because, as we were just saying, ever since humanity rebelled against God at the beginning, our entire existence has been under the power of death.

Everything, including us, is dying. But our inheritance is imperishable.

And the reason it's imperishable is because it's grounded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is what Peter just said in verse three. It all fits together. Jesus has defeated death on the cross.

Death has no power over him, which is why he was able to rise from the dead. He has now risen imperishable, and we are united to him. We're family members with him.

His imperishableness is promised to us. And that's one of the amazing promises of the gospel.

[32 : 49] Do you think about it? Every single human being inherits mortality from their parents. It's inescapable.

And we're helpless in trying to avoid passing on the inevitability of death.

But God is different. These children have an imperishable inheritance.

Second adjective is undefiled. That basically means to be spotless, unsoiled, to be pure. Our inheritance is free from any defilement.

There's no damage. There's nothing missing. There's no flaws. And that means that your participation in the family of God, if you're a Christian or if you become one, is going to be flawless.

[33 : 47] And so just think about everything that's wrong with you. So maybe you can look at your body and see that you're in physical pain. Maybe you're sore.

Maybe you're ill. Maybe you're weak. Maybe you're old.

In your future, you will be undefiled by all of these physical flaws.

Maybe you carry emotional scars. You think of every worry. Think of every awful thought that plagues you in the night. You think of everything that grieves your heart. You think of everything that you regret.

Your future inheritance is going to leave you undefiled by these things. You'll be restored.

[34 : 44] And you think of all that's wrong with the world, all the moral corruption, all the violence, all the horribleness that's in the world. There will not be one ounce of that in your eternal future.

And we were given a hint about all of this in the miracles of Jesus.

Because when Jesus came, he healed the blind. He restored the lame. He comforted the traumatized. He healed the broken. And all of these things were to be a foretaste of the new world, of the restored world, where all of these things will have passed away.

And that means that if you're struggling physically or emotionally, you can remind yourselves that you have an undefiled inheritance if you put your trust in Jesus. So never, ever, ever again will you have to experience any of the horrible consequence of humanity's sin.

And then third, adjective, unfading, basically means unending, permanent. It's actually a very rare word.

[36 : 05] It's actually used in Greek to describe a flower that's in perpetual bloom. And that a flower, a beautiful flower that's just in bloom permanently.

And so not only are we being told that your inheritance, that your future in Jesus is going to be amazing, you're being told that it will go on and on and on.

It will always, always be that way. Your inheritance will never lose any of its wonderfulness. One dictionary describes that word as meaning eternally fresh.

Isn't that a brilliant description? Eternally fresh. And that's why the promises of the gospel are at a level of your own, because even the very best things in this life will fade away.

Think of everything that's brilliant. This last week has been brilliant. The weather's been brilliant. It's been so, so nice. And it's been amazing to enjoy just the warmth and beauty of Scotland.

[37 : 18] It's fading away. And that brilliant week of weather is one less brilliant week of weather that you and I will experience in our lives.

Even the best of this life is fading away, but our inheritance in Jesus is unfading. These three adjectives are amazing, imperishable, undefiled, unfading, but I think the most astounding thing of all is what it says at the very end.

This inheritance is being kept in heaven for you.

Do you see what that's teaching you? It's teaching you that this is what God wants to give you.

And that should make all of us fall on our knees and worship the God whose love is utterly unsearchable.

[38 : 26] If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, if you're a Christian, God is saying, all of this will be yours.

If you're not yet a believer in Jesus, God is saying, all this can be yours.

And all he asks you to do is put your trust in him and follow him.

And by rejecting Jesus, you are disinherit yourself from all of this.

God is offering us this amazing hope and he's saying, it can all be yours.

[39 : 29] So is it all unbelievable? I don't think so. I think it's absolutely amazing.

Some people think that Christians are crazy. And if the resurrection isn't true, then maybe we are. But if the resurrection is true, if this promised future can be ours, if death really can be reversed, if we really can have eternal life, if God is offering that to you and you say, it's not the Christians who are crazy.

Let's pray together. Dear God, our Father, we thank you for all that you have done through our Savior Jesus Christ.

We thank you for his resurrection and for the hope that that gives us. And please, dear God, we pray that Scotland would find that hope and turn back to you.

Amen.