

We Have No Hope Without The Resurrection

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[0 : 0 0] As we meet to worship the Lord at the beginning of our new year and also as we remember and contemplate the sorrow and the brokenness that followed the loss of those who were drowned in the Islayer disaster, we come together to worship the Lord because he alone is worthy of our worship and we simply cannot get our heads round some of the things that transpire in life, the hard providences that come our way and the best thing that we can do in such circumstances and the best thing that we can do at the beginning of our new year is to come and worship the Lord, to acknowledge that he is Lord, that he is sovereign over all things and to acknowledge that we find hope only in him.

Now at times we may struggle to really work through in our minds the things that happen in life, the hard providences but we should be thankful that we are able to describe them in such a way and that these things are not simply cruel twists of fate, that even though these things are hard and difficult, that when we turn to God we find nonetheless that he brings hope in the midst of the hopelessness that we may feel, that he brings meaning and genuine hope to those who find themselves overwhelmed by the sorrows that sometimes come and that was certainly true in many of our communities in this community as well as many others in the island following the disaster that transpired a hundred years ago, especially given the context how it happened after the great loss of life through the war, during the war and the fact that this happened in peacetime made it in many ways even more painful and in that context it was a very great blow indeed.

But also we see in the midst of much of what happened we see that those who went through these great sorrows many of them called out on the name of the Lord and many of those who were involved had a great testimony to God's grace in their lives, those who survived, many of them were able to recount how the Lord had sustained them through their lives.

Of course that does not mean that they didn't live with that brokenness and that sorrow, it had an impact, it left a mark on their lives but nonetheless they were able to testify that they were able to rely upon the Lord and when we face such sorrow and such brokenness even when we're looking at the Islayer disaster from a hundred years hence from it, it's still although none of us were or I don't think that there are any of us here who were around at the time, I think there may be one or two in the community who may have been born around that time but we still feel the effects of it, it's something that has reverberated through our communities down through the years.

But when we face that reality of death and sorrow although we sometimes cannot fully work these things through in our minds yet when we turn to the Word of God we see that there is a hope set before us, a hope that is powerful, a hope that penetrates through the darkness and part of that hope is how Christ has conquered death.

[5 : 0 2] We don't see the fullness of that yet, the fullness of that will be seen in the resurrection and so part of our focus during the service today will be upon the resurrection, that great resurrection hope, that hope of life eternal when the Lord brings all things to an end and to a conclusion and He raises the living and the dead to judgement, some to eternal perdition, that those whom He has saved to eternal life and to experience all the fullness of what He has purchased for us in His redeeming death.

So we're going to sing God's praise now as we start our service, singing from Psalm 16, this is the sing Psalms version and this is a Psalm that points us towards the reality of that hope that Christ sets before us of the fullness of redemption of a life that is eternal and lasting where there will be no more sorrow, no more brokenness.

O Lord, You are to me my cup and portion sure, the share that is assigned to me, You guard and keep secure, the land allotted me is in a pleasant sight and surely my inheritance to me is a delight.

Bring ahead to that great eternal inheritance, that great and lasting hope that gives hope in the midst of the brokenness and the sorrow that may be a portion in this life.

O Lord, You are to me my cup and portion sure. My prayer is a prepared prayer in poetic form concluding with a biblical reflection, so let us pray.

[7 : 22] O Lord of God, to You we pray as we gather in Your house on Your year's day. We acknowledge that You are God over all, no matter what disasters upon us befall.

Our faith shall not flounder or fail us in that hour. Instead we shall cleave to You as we trust in Your power. For who else can we turn to in our hour of need but to the one who suffered on the cross-heated bleed, so that we who were strangers to grace and to God might know His forgiveness and peace through His word.

When our hearts are cast down and in perplexity, we look to You, Lord, from distress to set us free. As we recall the great loss and cruel seas, we approach the throne of grace to make our pleas.

On behalf of the many who were widowed and bereft, the many children without a father who were now left, to fend on their own with great anguish in their heart from that fateful night when their lives were torn apart.

O Lord of compassion, we ask ourselves why did such a great tragedy cause this island to cry? But no answer do we get, nor ever will it appear, so all we can ask is that you wipe away all our tears.

[8 : 47] For who knows what took place in that hour of distress? Did these men call on You and Your name confess? O Lord, from the depths to You they may have cried, and You answered them in these moments before they died.

The upbringing on this island made men aware of God. They knew the Scriptures. They were taught His word. From family worship to Sunday school attendance, none would be left with gospel ignorance.

So we trust that many on the Lord did call that night, not to give us false comfort, but rather to allow the light to shine in the darkness of our sorrowful memories and bring final closure to this tragedy of the seas.

Forever we'll remember our loved ones who were swept away, but now, Lord, lift the burden from the island. We earnestly pray.

There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the sun. A time to be born and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time for war and a time for peace.

[10 : 12] May the Lord grant us here in Lewis a time to let go, an end to our time of sorrow. May we embrace a time of joy and His peace in Jesus' name.

Amen. I'm going to sing now some verses from Psalm 90 in Gaelic, verses 13 to 15.

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How long will you delay? Have mercy on your servants, Lord, we pray, O satisfy us with your love always, that we may sing, rejoicing all our days, in place of our affliction, make us glad, give joy for all the years.

[11 : 49] You made us sad. These words, of course, remind us that sometimes sadness is part and parcel of our experience in life and clearly for the generations that preceded us.

That was very much the case, but we also give thanks that when we place our faith in the Lord, we can find a reality that transcends the brokenness of this world.

And part of that reality is a true heavenly joy. That's what the psalmist speaks of, and that is surely the cry of our hearts that we would know that great joy in knowing God and knowing that we are in His care, in His hands, that He is the one who upholds us through whatever circumstances come our way.

O hyorme yehol vavor, chai hyeniris ki ap. Let's turn now to God's word, turning to the New Testament and to the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

We're going to read from the 15th chapter, 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

[13 : 19] We'll read from the beginning of the chapter. Now, I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

That He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas then to the twelfth. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me, for I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace towards me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

[14 : 55] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep and Christ have perished, if in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people must be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. But as by a man came death, so by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead, for as an Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order.

Christ the first fruits, then it is coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet, the last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under His feet.

[16 : 27] But when it says all things are put in subjection, it is plain that He is expected to put all things in subjection under Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things in subjection under Him, that God may be all in all.

Otherwise what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? Why am I in danger every hour? I protest brothers, by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day.

What do I gain if humanly speaking I fought with beasts and Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die, do not be deceived, bad company ruins good morals.

Wake up from your drunken stupor as is right and do not go on sinning, for some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. But someone will ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?

You foolish person, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies, and what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare seed perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

[17 : 51] But God gives it a body as He has chosen and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds and another for fish.

There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star and glory.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead, what is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory, it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

It is sown in a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, the first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust. The second man is from heaven, as was the man of dust, so also were those who were of the dust.

[19 : 09] And as is the man of heaven, so also were those who were of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Behold, I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed.

This perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[20 : 23] Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

Amen. And may the Lord bless to us this reading from his own holy word. We'll read now to sing from Psalm 73 in the Scottish Psalter version, from a section down towards the end of the Psalm from verse 23.

Nevertheless, continually, O Lord, I am with thee, thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me. Thou with thy counsel, while I live, wilt me conduct and guide, and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide.

Whom have I in the heavens high but thee, O Lord, alone, and in the earth whom I desire besides thee there is none? My flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never, for of my heart God is the strength and portion forever.

For lo, they that are far from thee forever perish, shall them that are whoring from thee go, for they are as destroyed all. But surely it is good for me that I draw near to God, and God I trust that all thy works I may declare abroad.

[21 : 46] These words, of course, remind us and point us to that great reality, and that second stanza there, to thy glory afterward receive me to abide, that great reality, that great hope that is the hope of the believer, that they will be brought into the near presence of God and enjoy the wonder of that reality, the glory of his presence, the blessing that flows into their experience and account of that, and that is indeed the great hope of every believer.

Nevertheless, continually, O Lord, I am with thee. I am going to turn back for a few moments to the passage that we read in 1 Corinthians 15 and to meditate on some of what we see in this great chapter, this chapter that brings before us how vital, how important the resurrection is.

It's crucial because without this, Paul tells us every other belief. The rest of our faith is meaningless if this is not a reality.

Some in Paul's day were clearly teaching that resurrection was not a reality that would transpire in the future.

Now, what exactly the wider shape of their heresy was, they denied this and Paul says to them that if that is the case, then their faith is vain and meaningless.

[23 : 38] This is so central, so crucial. He's not speaking only of the resurrection in the future, but also saying that if that isn't a reality, then Christ's resurrection is real and that is really how he is explaining that their faith would be undone.

Because if Christ didn't rise from the dead, then we would have no confidence that Christ had conquered death, that he had victory over death, a victory that we taste as we come to faith in the Lord Jesus.

But the fullness of that victory still lies ahead. It will be fully realized in the resurrection, the bodily resurrection, and then all are raised from the dead.

We limit the Lord in our thinking far too often. We can say to ourselves, how could that possibly be?

How can every human being that has ever died be raised from the dead? It is as nothing for God.

[25 : 11] All he will do will be to give the Word, because his Word is that powerful. And sometimes that's what we fail to comprehend and fail to take to heart, that his Word is that powerful.

The lack of the resurrection is not pie in the sky, that has nothing to do with the everyday grit of life, that has nothing to say in the face of great tragedies like the loss of those who were lost in the eye layer disaster.

It has much to speak into our experience. Not that we fully understand all the things that have happened, but it speaks to us of a hope that goes beyond death, a hope that is a hope of the conquering of death, that in the end this great enemy or last great enemy will be fully vanquished.

That hope and that expectation speaks right into the heart, right into that grit, the discomfort and the hardness of life at times.

It speaks right into the midst of that, and it brings hope and an expectation. Who can say that to have true hope in the midst of loss is not a great thing?

[26 : 58] It has so much to speak into our hearts in the midst of such situations. And indeed if there was no hope in the midst of these situations, we would go out of our minds.

I suspect that part of the reason why so many people who don't have this hope drown their sorrows in so many different ways is that they simply cannot cope with these realities.

They try to escape them in any way they can. They fill their minds, their lives with noise of whatever kind, or do something to blot out the memories because of the hopelessness that they feel.

And so the hope that the Gospel sets before us speaks powerfully into the midst of these painful experiences.

Now we all see so much change and uncertainty in our lives. We never know what might transpire.

[28 : 17] We don't know when our end is, nor that of our neighbour. But this hope gives us a constant.

It is like a rock in the midst of the stormy seas of our experience. And we can lose sight of this.

We can focus on other things, but we need to remind ourselves of this great hope that the Gospel sets before us.

Now in verses 13 and 14 in our chapter we read these great words.

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. Now that's putting the thing in the negative of course in terms of Paul's argument.

[29 : 19] But his point is that Christ has been raised. That the preaching of Paul and the apostles is not in vain.

And that the faith of those who look for the resurrection and have that great hope in their experience is not in vain. It is a reality, an undeniable reality because Christ has been raised.

I want us to focus on this in three ways. Looking first of all to the past and then to the present and then to the future.

Looking at the past first of all, verse 17 says this, And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Christ has been raised from the dead. And that reality is what gives every believer the confidence, the faith and the confidence in him to know that their sins are forgiven.

[30 : 33] Because if Christ had not been raised from the dead, then we would not know that His sacrifice had been accepted. We would not know that our sins were assuredly forgiven.

But the fact that He is resurrected, that He is raised from the dead, it is God's assurance to us that yes, His sacrifice has accepted.

If He had not been raised, we would have no hope of sins forgiven. And if we had no hope of having our sins forgiven, we would have no hope for eternal life.

It would completely undo our faith. The resurrection, that is the great day of hope.

And it is in a sense like the new beginning for us, because it signals the reality of new life, of forgiveness of sin.

[31 : 47] That's why we meet every Sunday, every first day of the week. That is the practice of the church down through the ages, remembering that first day of the week when Jesus rose from the grave, triumphant over sin and over death.

And so what happened, 2,000 years in the past, it deals with our past and indeed our future sins. It deals with all of our sin, if we trust in Jesus.

Paul points out that Christ's resurrection and our resurrection are inseparably tied together. If there is no resurrection for us, there is no resurrection of Christ.

But if Christ is risen, then there is assuredly, there is certainly undeniably resurrection for every one of his people.

Resurrection to life in all its fullness and all its glory and all that great joy that is said before us.

[33 : 06] Now our resurrection may seem far away, but Christ's resurrection is the promise, the guarantee of our resurrection.

He is the first fruit of the resurrection, as Paul himself points out in this very chapter. He is the perfect prototype, his resurrection sets the pattern for what is yet to come.

For us, the resurrection to life, eternal life, is your faith centered on the resurrection of Christ as the assurance of your hope.

If the resurrection is marginal in our thinking, then something is wrong, because this is so critical, biblically speaking, that without this hope, there is no real hope.

And that would mean that in the midst of tragedy and loss, there would be no hope. It would become utterly and entirely unbearable.

[34 : 26] And that's why the gospel and the resurrection hope that is through faith in Jesus are so significant at those moments in our lives when we reflect on tragedy and sorrow, because this is the only real hope that we have.

And so what about the present? Well verse 26 says this, the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

And this reminds us that death still reigns over the lives of mortal men in our experience here and now. It appears that some in Corinth had trouble with the fact that after the victory of Christ on the cross and in the resurrection, death still held sway over their lives.

And I think that it seems that they had trouble processing that, and I suppose it's not entirely beyond the realms of our imagining to see why that could be so.

When we continue to see death and tragedy, the question can very easily arise, where is this victory of Christ over death?

[35 : 57] Now of course, that's a failure to see the timescale in which God is working and the plan that is set before us in the Scriptures, and that is that this will be fulfilled.

Everything will be brought to its conclusion, to its consummation at the end of time, the great resurrection day.

It is then that everything will come to its conclusion. It is then that God's people will enter into the fullness of what Christ has purchased for us.

And I suppose Paul makes this clear that this is something in its fullness that still lies in the future. We test of it now, and we have a guarantee of it now.

We will enter into the fullness of it then. But yes, when we look around us, it still seems like death is undefeated.

[37 : 14] But in reality, death is defeated, it is just not yet destroyed. It is the last enemy, that is, it is the enemy of humanity that will be the last to be dealt with and destroyed in fullness.

Now there is no doubt that there are discouragements in this life. We see tragedy, we experience the impact of death and of disease and of sorrow all around us.

We see this in our families, in our communities, in our own lives, such as the impact of the Islayer tragedy.

Hardly a family was unaffected. Those who maybe had someone in their immediate family obviously felt this the hardest. But it touched the whole community. And of course in a close knit community, hardly any family is really untouched.

I just learned last night that my great-grandmother lost a first cousin and a first cousin once removed.

[38 : 35] I wasn't aware that she had lost relatives who were fairly close to her. And my wife, she lost a great-grandfather in this tragedy.

And many of our families have been touched in ways that we can't fully explain and can't fully give account of, because of the impact of this tragedy upon their lives.

And of course, tragedy is not confined to a hundred years ago. Tragedy is at our doorstep.

Sometimes the scale is greater and other times it is less, but it is there nonetheless. And so when we feel discouraged by the apparent victory of death and disease, let us remember that Christ will at last put all these enemies under his feet.

Death is the last enemy which will be destroyed. It will be destroyed.

[39 : 58] Of course, the impact of these things can have such a tremendous and overwhelming emotional impact.

Some may have struggled to even see how life was worth living. They may have struggled to work these things through in their experience.

But we praise the Lord that many turns to Him and found in Him hope that He made their lives worth living by giving hope beyond the brokenness.

And in this hope that although they felt this brokenness and this pain and sorrow, they felt the shadow of death so keenly, yet the Lord upheld them, carried them through all of this.

And He calls each one of us to trust Him and to follow Him. And so there is a future. There is a future hope, a future to hope for, a future of life in all its fullness, life in Christ, and there will be no more death, no more tragedy, no more sin or disease, no more families bereft of sons and brothers and fathers and grandfathers and great grandfathers.

[41 : 51] There is no hope of eternal life without sorrow, without shame, without tears.

It may appear at times where God's people in their experience as though Christ's victory is not ours, a sorrow upon sorrow encroach upon the backdrop of our lives.

But we look to that great final victory. We must lift our eyes up and look to heaven, look to Jesus.

Look indeed for the great day of His coming again, when He will impose His victory upon all of creation, restoring it to glory, bringing a renewed creation, when He will put a crown of victory on the head of every believer who has endured to the end.

And you know this race that Paul speaks of, it's not like the races that we see in the great games like the Olympic games or the Commonwealth games.

[43 : 18] There's only ever one winner in the individual races, I guess you have team races, but there's only ever one winner in the individual races.

But just to be in this race makes us winners, because we have the greatest prize of all set before us, that great hope of eternal life and resurrection and to be with Him.

There is a full-orbed glory of hope for a restored and purified humanity enjoying the full blessing of God's presence.

Or maybe your hope is more limited than that. Maybe you haven't yet seen the glory of Jesus, maybe you haven't yet seen that He is the one who brings hope in the midst of the darkness.

But hope seems to be gone, that He is the one who stoops down and who holds us, who keeps the broken hearted from going under when they cry to Him.

[44 : 48] Christ, our Lord and Saviour Jesus, is the salvation of His people. He is their Saviour, and He will save them body and soul.

This is the great hope of the believer, that in the end we will know the fullness of that salvation, as Christ gives us new life, life renewed, resurrected to glory.

Not the same as Paul makes clear in this chapter, not the same as exactly as we have experienced here. More glorious, new life, life in greater fullness and blessing than we can even imagine or comprehend.

So as we step forward into this new year, may we do so with the hope of this life and resurrection in our hearts.

And as we remember the tragedy of a past generation, which was itself a tragedy upon tragedy coming at the end of the world war, first world war and all the loss of life connected with the actual hostilities.

[46 : 21] May we turn to the Lord, who alone gives us a hope that goes beyond death and the grave. Hope of resurrection and eternal life in a renewed world without sorrow or tragedy, death or sin.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You and praise You for the hope of the resurrection, the hope of life, eternal life in all its fullness, body and soul.

We thank You, Heavenly Father, for these great promises, this great hope, this great expectation, because Lord, we know that without it, in the midst of the turmoil of life, we would be hopeless, without any real hope.

We are bringing to other hopes that fail and let us down, that never seem to come up to that mark of what we are looking for.

We praise You, Heavenly Father, that in Christ Jesus we have the promise of every spiritual blessing. May we trust Him as we go forward into this year. May we look to Him and may He minister to us in ways that we can barely comprehend.

[47 : 56] May the work of Your Holy Spirit apply the fullness of the blessing that is promised in Christ, at least in terms of the fullness of what we can experience here and now. May that be poured out into our experience.

May we see much blessing, gospel blessing, may we see people renewed in their faith, revived, and may we see people also coming to faith in Christ for the first time.

May the gospel touch and impact our communities as it has done in the past. May it do so once again by Your grace, by the power of Your own Holy Spirit and work amongst.

We ask all these things in the precious name of Jesus. Amen. Let's throw the service to a conclusion, singing from Psalm 145 and sing Psalms from verse 10 down to verse 14.

All You have made will give You praise, O Lord. Your saints will all unite to bless Your name. The glory of Your reign they will declare and Your surpassing might they will proclaim.

[49 : 16] Thus all will hear about Your mighty acts and know the glorious splendour of Your reign. Your kingdom will endure forevermore for all time Your dominion will remain.

The Lord is faithful to His promises, to all that He has made His love as shown. The Lord Himself upholds all those who fall and lifts up everyone who is bowed down.

These verses in conclusion then to God's praise. I will sing from the opportunity of the silence of the invitation.

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The glory of Your reign they will declare and Your surpassing might they will proclaim.

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The Lord is faithful to His promises, to all that He has made His love as shown.

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No more martyred tunes of silence. No more martyred tunes of silence.

[53 : 12] No more martyred tunes of silence. No more martyred tunes of silence.

No more martyred tunes of silence.

Now be the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Be with us all. Amen.