

# **We Have a Living Hope in Jesus: A Living Hope Discovered!**

A sermon based on John 20:1-9

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Julie had been struggling for months. It was like she just couldn't seem to catch a break. So you could imagine my tepid surprise when she rushed through the door, ecstatic like she had just won the lottery. Hallelujah! Excitedly, she told me the great news. She had just been hired at a new firm. The pay was ok, certainly wasn't what she had been making at her previous job, but the opportunities to advance at this job were limitless! Her hopes for this new job were high. Things were turning around, and her happiness was through the roof! Hallelujah!

I'm sure you've been in situations like that before. At times, the excitement is contagious. The other person is happy, and you're happy, and hopes are at an all-time high! And you just can't help but joyfully respond, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

I wish I would have been a little quicker to shout those words as well, to have that celebratory mindset as well, on that first Easter morning, but I'll tell you the other disciples and I, we certainly didn't have the resurrection on our mind. None of us were in the mood to be rejoicing, especially me. I'll admit I, Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, one of his best friends, I was in a dark place.

You understand why, don't you? I mean, let's just rewind through the past few days. Thursday morning, I was still riding a high from the previous Sunday, Palm Sunday, Jesus' royal, triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It was a magnificent celebration!

And then the first few days of Holy Week, it looked like Jesus was at his peak form. His teaching was phenomenal. He was really giving it to Pharisees and the teachers of the law, beginning to expose them as the self-righteous hypocrites they were acting as. And I got a front-row seat. It was awesome! And the other disciples and I were beginning to think our luck was finally starting to turn around. All the negativity that others had tried to throw at Jesus' ministry was seemingly on its way out.

But then, Thursday evening came around, we were seated at the dinner table with Jesus, and everything took a turn for the worse. Jesus started talking about this being his last meal with us. Judas snuck away. Jesus told us one of us would betray him. I made the bold statement I would stand by his side the entire time, and the others agreed.

We went off to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus went off to pray by himself. We were supposed to keep watch and support him, but we fell asleep, were rebuked by Jesus, but fell asleep again. Then Judas showed up, with an army bent on squashing a rebellion, but it was just us! I got a little too carried away, sliced off one of the enemies' ears, was rebuked by Jesus again. Jesus was arrested, and I stood by his side...no, I didn't. I ran for my life, just like all the rest did.

I did come to my senses a few minutes later, so I trailed the angry mob back to the Jewish courts where I had probably the lowest moment of my life. Three separate times I could've stood up for my Lord, and I didn't. Three times I was asked if I was Jesus' disciple, and three times, each progressively more vulgar, I denied him. I denied any association with him. I denied even knowing who he was. And then I caught a glimpse of Jesus. I heard the rooster crow, and I remember how Jesus told me it would happen exactly like that.

And I remember just going outside and completely breaking down. I lost it. I went into a funk. I was so ashamed of my arrogance, my cowardice, my failing to stand up for Jesus when he needed me, when it mattered the most.

And things just spiraled downward from there. I had heard the rumors of Jesus' "trials" before the Jewish religious leaders and, early Friday morning, before Pilate. I had heard the shouts of the crowds as Jesus, this "criminal" was led through the streets, condemned to the worst death imaginable, crucifixion. And I had heard from John, who saw it, Jesus hanging on the cross, he told me how agonizing it was to watch our friend draw his final breaths. And I didn't even care enough to go and say goodbye.

You know, things like that happen, and you always start second-guessing yourself. If only I had done this differently or that differently, things would be different. Like, if only I had stuck by Jesus, maybe he would still be here today.

But that's where the other disciples and I were in the early hours of that first Easter morning...playing through the events of the past few days in our minds, each of us running through the whole gambit of emotions: mourning, despair, anger, frustration, depression. Throw in the fear and anxiety we were struggling with because we knew it would only be a matter of time before the Jewish religious leaders would be coming after us.

You want to talk about a living hope? Sure, it would have been great, awesome, amazing if Jesus walked through that door as if nothing had even happened, but we weren't waiting with bated breath. I think it's safe to say there really wasn't any hope in that locked room. Would you have expected there to be any? Looking back on that situation, there really should have been. We should have remembered what Jesus had said, multiple times, about having to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, but how that wouldn't be the end. We should have.

But we were only looking at the physical and thinking in the present moment, and Jesus wasn't there. He was in the grave, dead. So a living hope? Among the dead? We weren't going to find it there.

What was there? Hopelessness.

Have you ever been in those types of situations before, hopeless situations? The doctors said he was having trouble breathing on his own, it didn't look like he was going to make it through the night...pretty hopeless. They were months behind on their mortgage, and the bank gave them 30 days to make their payments current, but she was just laid off and his work won't let him get overtime...pretty hopeless. They had a massive blow-up with each other, they haven't spoken in weeks, and with each passing day they're digging their heels deeper in, and it's beginning to look like this relationship is lost...pretty hopeless.

So maybe you can begin to understand how I felt. But it wasn't just that. This wasn't just an earthly matter. It was one with eternal implications. I had believed Jesus was God. We all thought he was the promised Messiah, our Savior from sin. But that Sunday morning, that hope had all but vanished, and we were beginning to realize the truth in the apostle Paul's words, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

That was the true hopelessness. The one we had put our faith in as the Son of God was dead, lying in the tomb, and if he wasn't alive, we were still in our sins. They hadn't been paid for. Hell was still our eternal lot.

And if that's how things panned out, hell would have been your fate as well. Every one of you, lost in sin with no hope of ever finding your way out. I'm sorry to be such a Debbie Downer on this day of your celebration, but know, early that first Easter morning, there was nothing for us to celebrate.

But with just one person, everything changed! That mood, that hopelessness completely changed with just one person.

Lost in our thoughts, we were snapped back to reality by the sound of frantic woman. It was Mary Magdalene. I had known she intended on going back to the tomb to help give Jesus a more proper burial, but now, just a short time later she was back and hysterical. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put them," she sobbed. I think I knew what she meant. The grave was empty, so she assumed the worst, that the Jewish leaders had stolen his body so they might accuse us of doing that so we could proclaim how Jesus had risen from the dead, just as he said he would...

She had barely finished speaking, and John and I were out the door. We rushed to the scene of the crime, and by now, I'm sure you're well aware of how what we saw was a game-changer. The tomb was empty, almost looked as though no one had ever been there, and John and I, we rejoiced, right?!? If only. Yeah, John, to an extent, he knew what had truly happened, and he believed, but I think the gospel of Luke best describes my reaction, "Peter went away, wondering to himself what had happened."

But like I said, it took just one person to change everything. Now, you may or may not have heard about a new movie that's out, called "God's Not Dead." It's about the struggles of a college freshman, Josh, to prove his professor wrong when he says that God is dead, he doesn't truly exist. Now, I haven't seen the movie, but I know Josh works to produce well-researched, intellectual arguments and evidence to prove the existence of God in a head-to-head debate with his professor.

You want to know how I know God's not dead? You want the real proof? Look at the empty grave. It wasn't enough for me at the time, but spoiler alert, it was that same day the risen Lord, my true and best friend, appeared to me. He appeared to the Mary's. He walked with two disciples to Emmaus. Jesus even appeared Easter night in our locked room. Our Lord is not dead! He's risen! He's alive!

Do you get what that means? Listen to the apostle Paul, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins...But Christ has indeed been raised!" On that day, my hope was not lost. Jesus, God, my Savior, your Savior, he lived, he died, he rose! He's won the victory over the devil! Your sins are forgiven. Hell is no longer your lot. Heaven awaits you!

Just one person to change everything! And that person is Jesus. Now, I could say I've discovered a living hope that first Easter, but you know I didn't. That living hope discovered me, just like it did for you. Jesus died for our sins, and his resurrection gives us a living hope.

Why do we need hope? The story isn't new. Year after year you walk through this season of Lent, then Holy Week, and you know what's coming. You even get to celebrate every Sunday as a mini-Easter, so it should seem as though it's a no-brainer...of course you have hope!

But just like as for me, there's so much sin in the world, and every day it's tempting you to give up that hope or exchange it for something tangible, living to please this world's evil pleasures. But there's only hopelessness at the end of that road. But every day, our hope lives. Jesus lives! Our hope, based on Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection, leads to life...living with him in heaven forever.

Today, be reminded of that. The empty tomb gives you a reason to hope. Jesus' resurrection gives you a reason to hope. And be assured, this Easter hope will never die. It will bring us to celebrate the eternal resurrection in God's eternal kingdom, where we will join with every believer to praise our risen Lord, our living hope. But let's not wait until then. We can start the rejoicing right now. Alleluia! He is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.