

Easter

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[0 : 00] Well, maybe you want to have those verses in Romans chapter 8 open in front of you. But in the end, it's only a passing thing.

The shadow, even darkness must pass. A new day will come. I wonder what your heart's response is to the words of Tolkien's character, Samwise Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings*.

As they come at you this morning. Right? Check them out. Fanciful fairy tale. Wishful thinking. If only it were true, could it be true?

Well, here's what I want to do just for the next 15 minutes or so. Whoever you are here today, wherever you've come from, whatever you think about this man Jesus, I just want to present you for 15 minutes with the great Christian hope.

And why Jesus Christ walking out that tomb some 2,000 odd years ago, the first Easter Sunday, is the most magnificent and significant moment that you and I can ever hope to hear about.

[1 : 14] Now, I've got three children. Probably heard one of them this morning. And I was there at the Edinburgh Royal for each of their births.

I watched, I listened, I shed a tear or two, which for a Scotsman is saying something. Right? But the primary feeling I remember having as I was watching our children being born is that feeling of being utterly helpless in the situation.

In my struggle to work out as a man how I could help in those final hours, I learned that there's things that are helpful to say and there's things that are unhelpful to say.

Can I get you some water? It's a really helpful line. Would you like me to hold your hand? Another helpful line. I'm so proud of you. Another helpful line. All helpful lines.

But here's an unhelpful line. Can you guess it? I feel your pain. That's a dreadful line. Dreadful line.

[2 : 20] Because you don't have a clue about the pain. And yet, to totally contradict what I've just said, here's what the Bible would say. To the everyday follower of Jesus who's living their lives in this world day after day after day that so often, if we're honest, feel exactly the same, is that you do know the pain.

Maybe it surprises you to hear me say today that the central metaphor that the Bible uses to talk about the great Christian hope is the pain of childbirth.

Now, that might seem completely bizarre to you. Surely there was a better one that we could have picked. I mean, does God need a new PR team? One that's more in touch with the needs of 2022 people.

And yet, when you think about it, yes, bizarre, but when you think about it, how deeply profound, how real, how earthy.

It's what people, when they become Christians, I've so often heard them say that the Bible became the most real book of their lives because it is the word of our creator.

[3 : 34] You see, this idea that on the other side of all the pain and the suffering and the tragedy that we experience now as we live our lives in the world, on the other side, there's joy.

Let me explain. You see, in the beginning of the Bible story, there's perfection. God forms the world. The sky, the seas, the sun, the stars. He speaks.

It does his bidding. This God is all-powerful. It happens. He forms the world and then he turns to fill the world. Plants, animals, sea creatures, and the pinnacle.

And get this. Human beings. Every single life stamped with inherent dignity and worth. You see, the very concept that all life matters is not a 21st century discovery.

You come to the pages of the Bible and you'll see that it's an in-the-beginning declaration that's made over every single human life because we are made in the image of our creator God.

[4 : 37] And so right there is Adam and Eve, the first human beings, they're enjoying God and his good creation in the Garden of Eden. And most importantly, they're enjoying the blessing and the right, the blessing that comes through that right relationship with the God who made them.

And whoever you are here today, if you want to find joy and security, in your life, the Bible will tell you that the place to find it is in relationship with the God who made you. Make sense? Purpose and meaning are to be found in life with this God.

But you see, Adam and Eve's defiance against God, and that's how the Bible would describe the sin that's in every single one of our hearts and lives, causes Eve to eat the fruit, which means that God has to banish the pay of them from his presence.

And the ripple effects of sin, they go wide and they go deep. This is where we tap into our verses today. You see, creation has felt the effects of sin.

You see, when humanity fell into sin and death, the created order somehow shared in that fall. Nature is beautiful as it is. It isn't what it ought to be, nor is it what it was fully created to be.

[5 : 54] We often use that phrase, don't we? It's something that's just, it's not quite firing in all cylinders. You heard that phrase? Not quite firing in all cylinders. I think if we're honest this morning, in all of us at some level, we would acknowledge that about the created world, would we not?

Every time we hear of a natural disaster, every report that reaches our ears of the effects of climate change and the future of our planet, instinctively, what do we want to do?

We want to reach for the instruction manual. We're on Google. We're Googling a number of customer services. We're looking for that guarantee because I don't think this was the way it was designed to be.

It's the same with our human bodies. They too have been affected. Illness, sickness, joint pain, asthma, cancer, death, yeah, all things that weren't at the beginning of the Bible story.

You know, a friend recently down at the school playground was telling me how she was, she's been caring for her mum as her mum's been getting older and getting frailer. Every day she would go and see her mum, day by day by day and she said, I knew it was getting bad towards the end when the wedding ring just fell off her finger.

[7 : 06] It's not how it's meant to be. It's not how it's meant to be. That's tragic. I think we've maybe just got so used to death that we've become numb to the fact that death is the ultimate intruder and the Bible would call it the last enemy in God's great story.

And our emotions are caught up in this. Do you not know your own heart? Anger, bitterness, envy, rage. You look at it on a global scale.

Wars, jealousy. And on top of that, for the Christian believer, we have this indwelling battle with sin. We know the life that God has called us to, He saved us for, and yet we struggle in so many ways. And for many around the world, physical persecution. Again, the same question comes at us, is this the way that we were supposed to be? You know, let me ask you if you're here today and you're not a Christian, what do you do with that?

It's all well and good, isn't it, whistling the jolly tune of Monty Python? When you're chewing on life's gristle, don't grumble, give a whistle, and this will help things turn out for the best. But we know that life's not as simple as that.

[8 : 15] It's not a helpful line if talking of unhelpful lines. It's not one to pull out at a funeral, is it? What do you do with that? Where do you go with that? How do you process that?

Well, for the Christian, the follower of Jesus, here's where our metaphor kicks in. As we live in, our lives in this world and in these bodies, as we experience what that is, we groan, we long, we yearn for the day when this would all disappear, this would all be a distant memory.

As we do that, we are experiencing, the Bible would say, the pains of childbirth. We know the pain of those things, but there's hope.

And that's what Easter Sunday is. It's a declaration, heaven's declaration of hope. What? Where? How? Why? Why? The answer to all of these, the Bible primarily presents us with a who.

You see, Jesus of Nazareth walks onto the stage of human history. You have to say, the most absorbing personality ever to have walked this planet. You know, I was looking at it this week.

[9 : 30] In fact, back in 2013, data researchers at Wikipedia announced Jesus as the most famous person in history. Napoleon II, Shakespeare, coming in for the bronze.

To be or not to be, it wasn't to be for Shakespeare. Jesus, the most absorbing personality of history, compelling individual, wonderfully true. You cannot read the Gospels and conclude anything other

than that this Jesus is magnetically wonderful.

I mean, I often, as a Christian believer, just read the Bible and think, who would have come up with a Jesus as good as this? But Jesus says that he's more, not just popular, but Savior.

He is God in human flesh. And yet, with those credentials, his life ended on a cruel Roman cross. What's going on there? It's just a substitution. He is taking the punishment that the sins of his people deserve, and he's taking them on himself. He dies in the place of his people.

[10:38] He pays the debt, the enormous debt that we've racked up against our Creator and one that was standing against us. And on the third day, he rose. It's heaven's verification that this man is who he says he is.

He did what he said he'd done. You see, when Jesus rose and walked out of that tomb, his, I need to get this, his earthly body having been replaced by his new resurrection body, the perishable, having given way to the imperishable, the body that was subject to death now replaced with a body never to see decay.

He was doing more than pulling off a neat trick. Jesus was putting the curse of sin and the inevitable destination of death, and sin and death are just two sides of the same coin.

He was putting the gear into reverse. Bringing in the dawn of a new age is the first fruits. I love that phrase, first fruits. You ever wonder, I remember our kids love, they love strawberry picking.

We go up to Fife, you might have done that. I always love the thought of a farmer working hard over the winter and then at this point in the year, the first strawberry's there. Bang, the rest of it's going to come.

[11:57] First fruits. That's Jesus. You know, it's almost as if when he walks out of the tomb, he gets a rope and he throws it back in and says to all of creation and to all those who would hope in him and trust him as Savior, and he says, grab hold.

You're coming out with me. For the truth is that one day when Jesus returns all of creation and every single believer will, as it were, follow him out of that tomb as well.

As Jesus returns and ushers in this new creation, you see, creation at the moment is like a full, as C.S. Lewis described it like this, is like a full piece of orchestra all set up ready to play but sitting in a darkened hall gathering dust and yet on that day when Jesus returns, it will gloriously play.

Similar with our bodies, right now, death and decay but then we'll be transformed to be like his glorious body, never again to see decay, enjoying the new creation with the God who made us and the God who loves us.

Having banished all evil. And that's why this comes this morning as a loving, inviting warning to those of us who do not know this Jesus as King and Savior.

[13:22] If you reject him, if you continue to do that, the groaning that you feel will not end in hope. Your sins will see you end up facing eternal death and judgment, caught up in the victory of Jesus over his enemies.

And that's why this morning the news that Jesus is alive should grab your attention and cause you to fall on your knees and worship him. When the old order of things is gone and the new order with Jesus as King has come.

And viewed like that, you can see why childbirth is the perfect metaphor. And that's why you do know the pain.

And some of you will be feeling the pains of that right now in all sorts of different ways. Medical conditions, mental struggles, relational tensions, family concerns, the death of loved ones that is just bringing a sting and it's a scar that you will probably be carrying for the rest of your life.

Bring them together. What is it? It is the pains of childbirth. You know, sometimes I find in my job when you hear and you walk with people through certain things in life, all you've got is a soul which cries out and he says, come Lord Jesus and make it new.

[14:52] I pray, whoever you are here today, that your soul is strengthened by God's Holy Spirit living in you, dwelling amongst us, that in this risen Jesus there is hope abounding.

And I love that, just as he said at the tomb that very first Easter day, we heard it read, Jesus just said, Mary. This follower of Jesus, she had her life transformed by him and yet the one in whom she hoped was gone.

And yet Jesus says, doesn't just say generic woman, he says, Mary, I know you, everything's changed, life's going to be all right.

Do you know why? Because I've died for your sin and I live and I love you and everything's changed. Would you hear through the Spirit of God living in you, would you hear in a similar way, I pray, him speaking your name today, that there is joy on the other side of the pain.

You know, sometimes in life you just have to stop what you're doing and you just have to remind yourself, don't you, that 2,000 years ago somebody walked out of the grave and it's changed everything because in the end it's only a passing thing, this shadow.

[16:20] Even darkness must pass a new day will come. So what do you reckon this morning? Fancy, fanciful fairy tale?

Wishful thinking? If only it were true, can it be true? Jesus says to each of us today, he says, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Do you believe this? So that's the question we've got to think about today. If you'd love to explore that, you'd love to read about this Jesus, make up your own mind as to who you think he is, it would be our joy to do that with you.

Please just speak to somebody who maybe you came with today or somebody at the door or grab me afterwards. We'd love to make that a possibility because there's life to be found in this Jesus.

So why don't we just be quiet for a moment just before we close our service together and sing.

Why don't we just take a moment and be quiet, be still and then I'll just bring us back and we'll close in prayer. Amen. For in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is no hope at all.

[18:06] Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. And we thank you, Father God, for the wonderful earth-shattering news of the Jesus who walked out of that tomb all those years ago.

and we thank you that that really has changed everything. And so I pray for whoever is here today, for those who, maybe this is the first time they've heard about this Jesus, your son, would today be the day that they find life and forgiveness in him.

Father, for those who are struggling this morning, who are feeling the pain, oh, may the truth of the glorious Jesus capture and strengthen hearts this morning.

We just thank you for the truth that he is risen, that he knows our names, that he is interceding, he's praying for us at your right hand and that gloriously one day he will return.

The one who says, behold, I am making everything new. Oh, Father, we pray that you'd be with us as we finish our time together.

[19:24] Thank you for this morning and we pray these things in Jesus' powerful name. Amen.