

Find the Hope You're Looking for

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[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone. Did our kids go to school? I did the school Easter assembly! I asked them for feedback, how it went. Grace said I was way too enthusiastic. So we'll see how we go! Unapologetic in being enthusiastic about this passage. So if you've got a Bible there, you need to come to Luke 24. We're kind of taking in verses 13 to 35 primarily, but you can have your eye over the first little bit there if you want as well. And this morning is all about hope. It's all about hope. The man on the screen is one of Scotland's finest ever boxers. He's called Josh Taylor. Love his nickname. The Tartan Tornado. Isn't that quite cool? Tartan Tornado. Here's the three biggest things on his boxing CV. Number one, he's a Commonwealth Games gold medalist. Number two, he's an Olympian. Number three, in 2021, he became the undisputed light welterweight world champion. Now, if you're not into boxing, let me just tell you that that's a pretty big deal.

Good CV for a boxer. But here's the thing. After one of his fights last year, I mean, it was a couple years ago. The doctors discover a tear in the retinal tissue behind his left eye. And the thing is, it's not actually one tear. It is six tears. And the doc gives it to him straight at the consultation.

And he says this, if you compete again, the likelihood is you're going to lose sight completely, permanently in your left eye. And in a moment, Josh Taylor's career was over at the age of 34.

Just like that. And he said this in a raw and honest interview with the BBC last summer, as he kind of reflected on this moment. I'm going to take this in.

He said, it was kind of like falling straight off the edge of a cliff. I'm not going to risk losing my sight for the sake of just one more fight. But it was like the end of my world. And it was that last sentence, as I read this interview recently, that grabbed me. It was the end of my world.

[2:33] Have you been there? A moment when hope vanishes like smoke from a birthday candle. And hope's a curious creature, isn't it? For us human beings, it's filed not in the nice to have column. Hope is filed in the must have column. We need hope to live like we need oxygen to breathe.

Here's what I want to suggest to you today. Wherever you are on this God stuff, whatever's going through your mind, whatever you brought in here today, that we creatures are hardwired for hope. Remember the slogan that was plastered all over the country during that COVID season of life?

Sorry to bring back the memories. Remember when we were out clapping for carers and we were all trying to do our bit to kind of keep our spirits high? And these billboards were plastered everywhere up and down the UK. Please believe these days will pass. Hope. In Greek mythology, what was the one thing that didn't escape from Pandora's box? It was hope. In fact, it's been said that one of the lowest moments that a person can experience in life is when the thing that you had your hopes pinned on, the thing that you thought would deliver lasting joy, deflates quicker than a leaky helium balloon. Been there? See, if that's you here today, then let me just say again that you've not just picked a good Sunday to come to church. You've picked the best Sunday to come to church because this morning, this is all about the key to hope. And you've got to see it in this passage. Come with me and see it. We pick up the narrative at verse 13. And these two men, one of whom we later discover is called

Cleopas, are walking and talking on that seven mile journey from Jerusalem back west to a place called Emmaus. Now notice all the little details there. The historicity of this. Place names, people names, distances. Do you see it? And what we're going to do this morning is just eavesdrop in for the next 20 minutes on their conversation. Can I tell you the mood in the camp when we hit verse 13? You get it at verse 17. Downcast. Do you see it? Downcast. The mood in the camp is that it feels like their world has ended. Because their despair is all tied up with a king that they thought they had.

So this man, Jesus, do you see how they're talking about him, right? Verse 19. Here's the conversation. A prophet powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. That's who they thought he was.

So hear it in their voice. We saw this man. We loved this man. We trusted every word that he spoke.

And we staked it all on this man, following him. And honestly, for so long, it felt so, so good.

I mean, Jesus, he was outsmarting the smartest. He was healing people left, right, and center. His teaching was like that, like we'd never heard before. And we followed him all the way to Jerusalem because verse 21, we had, and there's our word, hoped that this was it. We thought this was it. We thought this was the moment when Jesus would finally be seen in front of all those who mocked and doubted and belittled and laughed. He would be seen to be Israel's long expected and mighty king. We thought this was it. It's all kicking off. The king that God promised he would send us, who would defeat our enemies, and he would rule for us and for our good. But as it turns out, Jesus was all talk.

[6:47] Because his fate was like that of every other human being who's ever lived. And do you know what the saddest part of this is? Verse 22. Some of our little group who got up early to go and check out the tomb on call at Sunday morning are trying to convince us that a stone that was in front of it has been rolled away and that some angel spoke to them and that actually he might be alive.

And just in case you're thinking these people were gullible back in the day, do you see verse 11? The reaction that people give to this news that he might be risen, what is the word there? It is nonsense. So they ain't gullible. They thought this was nonsense. Can I just a little apologetic angle here? If that's you this morning, we've got tons of these books called, Is Easter Unbelievable to Giveaway? This is all about why you can trust these events for yourself. That's a great question to ask, isn't it? None of us are believing this because it's a nice thing to believe.

We're believing this because we were convinced it's true. But you see how in the text on this road to Emmaus, they are saying, can we just stop the nonsense now?

Can we just get on with life? Because life is back to how it always was before Jesus even came in the scene. Forecast a bit like a normal Edinburgh day weather-wise. Yeah? Short times of heavy rain, occasional clouds, fleeting spills of sunshine, the occasional drop of snow, and it's dark again before you know it. And where does that leave you? Well, it leaves you, I was thinking this week, Spotify premium random playlist is a wonderful thing. I was reminded of a band from my youth called MGMT.

Yeah? They had this song, and they articulate it so well in the lyrics to their song, Time to Pretend. And this is it. It goes like this, the chorus. This is our decision to live fast and die young. We've got the vision. Now let's have some fun. Yeah, it's overwhelming, but what else can we do? Get jobs and offices and wake up for the morning commute? Do you hear what they're saying? If this is it, this is it, then let's squeeze as much fun as we can out of our three score years and ten existence. See, if Jesus isn't risen, then as John Lennon put it, people are really living for today.

[9:29] And again, if that's where your horizons are this morning, can I just hit you with a bit of C.S. Lewis? When it comes to the things that we think life is all about compared to knowing the God who created us and exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our passions are not too strong. They're too weak.

We're far too easily pleased. The invitation here is to come and know this God. But do you see verse 15? Here's why there's more to the story here.

Cleopas is walking, making that seven-mile journey. Do you see verse 15? They're not alone on that journey. They have no idea, but Jesus is walking alongside them. So get this. They're telling him about this king they thought they had, and he responds by telling them about a book they thought they'd read.

And I love this scene because it is comical. They tell Jesus about how there was a man called Jesus who was crucified. Guys, that's funny. We can laugh at that. Is that not what they call in the acting business? Dramatic irony. In other words, the characters in the story don't know what's going on, but we the readers know what's going on. This is funny. And Jesus responds by saying, verse 26, of course he was. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things? Don't you get it, says Jesus, to these two men? What you've witnessed is not the derailing of the plan.

What you've witnessed is the very fulfillment of the plan. And let this blow your mind when it comes to what you and I think the Bible is. I don't know where you're at on that.

[11:25] Religious self-help manual, a dated moral book. You can keep on going. So, do you know what the Bible is at its very essence according to this passage? It's a story. In fact, do you know what? We can do better than that. It's not just our story. It's the story. Because are you thinking what I'm thinking here? Why hasn't Jesus just revealed himself to these men? Right? They kind of see him, but they don't see him. It's not a bit strange.

I mean, if I were Jesus, I think I'd have sprung out one of those giant cakes going, surprise! And so you've got to ask, why is he doing it this way? Yeah? You with me? Why is he doing it this way? Can I give you my two cents? And hear me out on this because it is crucial to hope. He wants them to understand and have absolute confidence in the story. Jesus is wanting their confidence to be in the scriptures. Not in the fact that they can see him. No, no, no. He wants their confidence to be in the scriptures. And particularly who he is and where they are in God's great plan. This story all about a great God who created us. But like dominoes happily falling from the first topple that was Adam and Eve as they rebelled against God. Friends, we have happily followed suit when it comes to rebelling against the God who made us. Bible calls that sin. The cosmic rebellion against our creator. If you think about it like this, it's S-I-N, shove off God, I'm in charge, no to your rules. That's sin. Yeah?

And that disease exists in every one of our hearts. Friends, sin's not a little deal. Sin is a big deal. So big, in fact, that it separated us from our creator. Offends him. And the thing is, for you, I just had never seen it in my heart. The rebellion that existed against the God who loves me and knows me and created me. My sin offends him. But the thing about the Bible story is to save us because he loves us and to show us how great and glorious he is. It's all about his glory. He initiates the greatest plot to the greatest story in all of human history. Jesus is both the long-spoken lamb that dies and he is the lion that roars that God promised he'd send. My real sin put a real man on a real cross.

And that real man was put in a real tomb with a real stone rolled in front of it. And that real stone on the third day was rolled away. And that real man walked out. All of this is real. Jesus is God's Savior King come to win his people through his death on the cross. And what proves that what he did worked is the fact that God exalted and vindicated him by raising him from the grave. I was trying to explain it to the girls on Friday night as we're driving home from the Good Friday service.

[14:48] How do we know what Jesus did on the cross worked? And it is a bit like paying for a meal out or anything that you pay for with your bank card.

And you tap your bank card and there's always that three seconds. Have I got enough credit in the bank? Is this going to go through? Has this worked? And what convinces you that it has worked is the receipt. The resurrection is the receipt. This has worked. He has paid for our sin.

Forgiveness is abounding because our faith is in him. And better than that, by faith we are united to him. Forgiven, loved, adopted, known.

And so in the narrative, do you see how Jesus engages in the most comprehensive Bible study ever with these two men? And you're only getting 20 minutes this morning, but imagine these guys get more than 20 minutes. And he helps them appreciate verse 27, that this story is all about him. Friends, God didn't give us his word, the Bible, to answer every one of life's questions. He gave us it to show us Jesus, who is the solution to our biggest problem.

[16:10] And let me just tell you, that is by far greater. A story that will culminate with Jesus returning as heaven's champion. And when he returns, he will make all things new and he will put all wrongs to right.

New heavens and a new earth. That is the next thing in this story for him to return. And death will not be the end of the story for all those who have repented of that sin and have run to Jesus with nothing but open arms saying, I love you and I trust you.

I need your forgiveness. I need your compassion. I need your love. And death will not be the end for all those who've trusted in this Jesus because it wasn't the end of the story for him.

I mean, isn't, if you think about it, isn't understanding the plan, the story, going to be so important for these men when one day, very, very soon, they will not physically be able to see Jesus anymore because he's ascended to heaven.

And here's the point. We too can trust Jesus when we can't physically see him because we know that our confidence is in the scriptures.

[17:28] It's in the story. It's knowing what's up ahead. Jesus wants our hearts tethered to this story. And so from explaining a book they thought they'd read, suddenly they see the true identity of a man they thought they knew.

Do you see it? During this meal, and it's for another time, but it's really interesting that it's through the taking of the bread and the wine, that all of a sudden Jesus opens their eyes and they see it's him. Do you see that?

What do they say to each other? Verse 32, as they reflect on that Bible study that Jesus did with them. What a growth group that would have been. Didn't our hearts burn within us as he opened the scriptures to us?

Feel that language. And is that not the experience of everyone who's come to see who Jesus is and know life with him? All of a sudden this book makes sense.

Can I tell you, see when we go looking for us in this story, it's a pretty disappointing experience. But see when we go looking for Jesus in this story, can I tell you from an experience that is way more exciting?

[18:35] Our hearts burned within us as he showed us himself in the scriptures. I wonder where he went. Love to have known where he went there. But here's the thing.

Because Jesus did this Bible study with them, because he has their faith anchored in him and in the scriptures, everything's changed. And so having discovered the identity of a man that they thought they knew, they find themselves making a trip they never thought they'd make.

Do you see this? Now I'm pretty confident that Jerusalem didn't have a train station back in the day. But if it did, do you see how these men at the beginning of this scene have bought a one-way ticket out of there?

We'll now see verse 33, how they cannot get back quick enough. Because the news that Jesus has risen has totally transformed their lives.

Their hope has been reignited. Life as they know it flipped on its head. And when they go back to Jerusalem, where do they go? They go straight for their fellow believers.

[19:40] And I imagine they scream the words of verse 34 that sum this all up. It is true. He is risen.

That this man, Jesus, is alive. And the way that I think Luke ends the narrative at verse 30, as Jesus kind of just disappears from sight, I think what he's showing us here is that this story isn't over.

This isn't happily ever after. It's not like these three men just kept walking into the sunset and roll credits. This is more like to be gloriously continued.

Yeah? So think about it like this. What comes after Luke 24? Acts 1 comes after Luke 24. Isn't it?

That the story of how the risen Christ, through his prophets, this gospel message, goes to the peoples of the world, around the world, through the generations, how it continues to reverberate and give life to people as they hear and as they are tethered to the scriptures and understand who Jesus is.

As you see how hope abounds in this passage. You know, just as we close, there's a, and I can tell this story because she's not here this morning.

[21:06] There is a girl in our church family called Abby. And Abby moved to Edinburgh from Singapore last year. And I remember speaking to her recently. And she said, see the thing about Singapore is that every day is sunny.

And she said, I never knew what it was until I moved to Scotland to experience one, two, three, four days where you don't see the sun. And it's, it's true, isn't it?

In winter, it feels like that. Like the sun that goes, disappears, goes away at, what, three in the afternoon and it reappears kind of June.

It's kind of what it feels like, isn't it? It's, the winter is brutal here. But then here's what she proceeded to say. She said, this time of year, it's spring. I had never experienced the elation that comes when spring appears.

Yeah? And do you not kind of, I mean, ignore the snow, right? Run with me just now. But it is the experience, isn't it? Every year that we have at this time of year, the birds start singing.

[22:14] I think I've not heard them sing in months. You actually feel the warmth in your, your neck. I smelled freshly mown grass the other day.

Yeah? The flowers begin to bloom. The trees begin to bud. All these things begin to happen. It's springtime. And she said, I never knew that elation of waiting for spring to come, for the darkness to disappear and the light to be here.

Never knew what it was until I moved to Scotland. So everybody should move here, right? To experience this. But, but here's the thing I heard, I thought about what she said and I thought, boy, that's deep.

It's like, it almost is if God has woven clues to resurrection hope in the way that he's designed this.

Yeah? You think about those things? That yearning for darkness to disappear and take it further, for evil to be banished and for every wrong to be put right.

And in its place, it's swallowed up by the light appearing and justice being done and righteousness being the thing that dominates.

[23:26] And you think it's as if God has woven these clues in. Friends, here's the thing. When Christ returns, that's what it will feel like, but exponentially greater.

Do you see the hope that abounds in this passage? That is the hope of Easter. Where there was no purpose, now there's purpose.

Where there was no hope, now there's hope. Where there was no life, now there's life. Where there was no future, now there is one. As we wait for his return, that is the hope of Easter.

And so Jesus, Easter's champion, the one who holds the keys of death and life, he holds them out to us this morning and asks us to come to him, particularly if you do not know him this morning.

He holds out his hands and says, come to me, come and receive forgiveness, life, and hope. Thine be the glory, risen, conquering son, endless is the victory.

[24:41] Thou or death has won. Why don't I pray? And so God, we thank you for this morning. We rightly celebrate the glorious news that Jesus is not dead, but he is alive.

Thank you for the forgiveness and the new starts and the transformed lives and the future and abounding hope that the risen Jesus holds out to us today.

truly, that day changes our every day. So Father, be with us this morning as we close our time in celebratory singing.

Father, thank you for Jesus and we pray all of these things in his powerful and in his precious and in his loving name. Amen.