

## **“Easter HOPE ... When You Need It Most!”**

***“Unless Christ was raised to life, your faith is useless, and you are still living in your sins. And those people who died after putting their faith in Him are completely lost. If our hope in Christ is good only for this life, we are worse off than anyone else. But Christ has indeed been raised to life!”***

1 Corinthians 15:17-20 [Contemporary English Version]

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed. These words give us hope. No matter what your present situation or circumstance is, no matter how terror-filled your todays and tomorrows may be, a living Lord lets us know we can have hope and peace. In His resurrection, Jesus has defeated sin, death and the devil for us. And Christ's powerful presence empowers us to believe that in Him, we have been given more than a wishful thought for the future – but we are offered a concrete certainty of salvation in heaven ... and that brings joy now, even in the middle of troubles.

The boy was little when his mother passed away. Along with *his* grief, the father had to deal with the overwhelming task of trying to be both father and mother to his son. To that end, Dad planned a picnic. The day before the event father and son together picked their destination, packed the lunch, and loaded the car. Then, before getting an early start, it was time for a good night's sleep--right? The boy couldn't sleep. Excitement of what was to come kept him tossing, turning, and twisting as only a little boy can. Eventually, he got up, crept into dad's room, and waited until father's sleepy eye opened. "Son, what are you doing up at this hour?" "I can't get to sleep." "Why can't you get to sleep?" "Daddy, I can't wait for tomorrow." "Son, we're going to have a great time. But it won't be nearly as great if you don't get some sleep first. Just go back to bed and try to turn off your mind. You'll fall asleep." The son did as dad suggested--for a while. Within 10 minutes, a freshly sleeping father felt himself being prodded and poked. "Dad, dad, are you awake?" "I am now,

son." "Dad, I wanted to say something before I go to sleep."  
"And what did you need to say that won't wait?" "Dad, I just  
wanted to thank you for tomorrow."

I like that story. I like that boy. I like his thought: "Dad, I just  
wanted to thank you for tomorrow." I like, it, but I wonder how  
many of us are ready to say, "Heavenly Father, thank You for  
tomorrow?" Think about it for a moment. Most of us are fearful of  
today and dreading what the rest of the week might bring. These  
days HOPE, and the joy and peace of mind and heart that hope  
brings – are hard to find.

Our world is in turmoil – and many of us live in fear. There is  
a sense of hopelessness in our homes producing fatigue.

When it is time for children to go to bed at night, many plead,  
*"Pl-eeese may I stay up ... just a few more minutes?"* For most  
kids, there is one more glass of water to drink, one more song to  
sing, one more story to read, one more hug. Children love living,  
and hate to go to bed. They're afraid they're going to miss  
something great going on while they sleep.

How different from many of us adults! Many are tired and  
overwhelmed. They look forward to laying their head down on their  
pillow, just to escape for a while – to shut life out.

Perhaps you have lost a loved one recently. Maybe you  
have lost your marriage partner to the agony of divorce.

Most of us are socially isolated during this pandemic. The  
stay at home and shelter in place orders leave most of us  
experiencing a very different Easter this year -- this is likely the  
first holiday you are not sitting with your family.

Many of us have lost employment and financial security.

Many, many people lie in bed at night and feel like the  
weight of the world is on them. There is a hopelessness in our  
homes.

Many of you are working from home, kids are not in school,  
and college students are learning on line from their childhood  
bedroom. We are all under the same roof, and because of nature  
of our sinful, selfish hearts, the family can become a powder keg.

All is not sweet in your “home sweet home.” And so lots of people are walking around feeling like damaged goods these days. And lots of folks eventually stop believing that they can ever overcome the effects of growing up in a family where there was raging or shaming or controlling or abuse or the absence of nurturing love.

And, the truth is, there are lots of us who are struggling with a secret habit or a destructive addiction of some kind. One that we just can't seem to shake. You want to redefine hopelessness? There's not much worse than to get in the grip of a destructive pattern of some kind that's eroding your life and then to feel powerless to be able to break free from it.

We know we're one step away from a plunge into the abyss. And in spite of all this, even though our lives are hurting and damaged, today, I boldly urge you to hear this certain, hope-filled promise: God will meet you with His Easter power!

A family with young children was driving past a cemetery where there was a freshly dug grave. As they passed, their little girl pointed to the mound of dirt and said, “Look Mommy, ... One got **out!**” Of course we know that a mound of dirt in a grave yard does not mean that one got out. All of our experience tells us that corpses do not come back to life. And this harsh reality of life may cause you to believe that the account of Jesus' resurrection is nothing more than fantasy and wishful thinking. But Jesus GOT OUT! He is the only one in history who got **out!**

When Jesus was laid in the tomb on Good Friday, His real death was changed to real life by His resurrection early on Easter morning. And this there is an empty tomb in Israel that bears witness to that fact. There were eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection who wrote down the record and it's been preserved to this day in the Bible. Even Jesus' enemies plainly stated that His grave was empty and they couldn't produce a dead body. Beyond that, millions of people every year all over the world experience inner spiritual transformation when they begin to trust

and follow the risen Christ. And this just continues to baffle the skeptics who think this whole deal should have died out a long time ago.

You know, Jesus' disciples, His followers long ago, were a lot like us. Their hope was dashed in fear, fatigue, and failure. But, one of the things that fascinates me about the Easter story is the sudden change in the disciples. One minute they're defeated, the next minute they're dynamic. One minute they're crushed, the next minute they're confident. One minute they're having a pity party, the next minute they're taking on the world. What made the difference? Only 1 thing – the FACT – the truth of Jesus' Resurrection. They had been with Jesus – the One who got **out**. Not merely knowing He's alive, but being with Him, having a relationship.

The disciples were changed because Jesus was with them. Are you aware that God is always with you? You **lose** your **fear** when God is near. He's with you. Jesus is alive and He says, ***"I'm always with you."*** That gives you hope. You can say, "Lord, I know You're with me. I know you will help me handle this."

In our Bible text, Paul writes: ***"If Christ has NOT been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins."*** He's saying that if Jesus hadn't been raised there would be no way you could ever start over. All your mistakes, all your wrongs, all your guilt – there'd be no hope of ever being forgiven all that. "But" he goes on, ***"Christ HAS INDEED been raised from the dead."*** 1 Corinthians 15:17,20

Jesus' resurrection guarantees that when He gave His life dying on the cross for you – His payment WAS ENOUGH! Your wrongs are paid in full. God the Father accepted Jesus' death as complete payment. His resurrection is the guarantee, the living proof. Forgiveness for all of your past is offered – free, and complete!

When I was a boy about 10 yrs. old, I built a pinewood derby car for Cub Scouts. I tried to make that little race car, but it was a mess. Then my father came in and said, "Son, you can start

over and this time I'll help you." Do you think I got motivated? Do you think I had hope when we started over? You better believe it! And it looked great when it was done, because he was with me.

That's what your Jesus wants to say to you. "You messed up your life? OK. You can start over and this time I'm going to help you. I will be with you." Christ offers to forgive all your past mistakes and mess. And He is alive and with you. That's the good news of Easter.

Every one of us have skeletons in our closet and we say, "I wish... What if... If only... I wish I could change that..." God says, "I don't care how low you go, or where you've been." In Isaiah 54:7 **"God says, 'With deep love I will take you back.'"**

Jesus picked up all your past – yours, mine, everybody's. All the good we forgot to do & all the bad we remembered to do. Jesus took it on Him, and took it to the cross on Good Friday. And Easter morning guarantees that Jesus' life given for you **PAID** -- completely **paid** -- for all your past and mine. That's what Easter is all about. He wants to start a new beginning in **your** life.

**Accept** this free offer of forgiveness today. Make it yours by trusting Jesus – counting on Him as the solution to your past. There is hope – hope to start over.

Jesus' Resurrection gives you hope to start over, **AND hope to keep going.**

Our Bible text again tells us the fix we'd be in IF Christ HADN'T been raised back to life – there'd be no hope of heaven:

***"If Christ has not been raised ... those people who died after putting their faith in Him are completely lost. If our hope in Christ is good only for this life, we are worse off than anyone else. But Christ has indeed been raised to life!"***

If Jesus hadn't been raised, there'd be NO WAY you or I could ever reach an eternity with God in heaven. All this life would end in a 6 foot deep hole in a graveyard.

But when Jesus rose on Easter morning, He demonstrated that He has the power over death and the grave. He is the first to rise, and one day He will raise all people back life,

When you trust Jesus, your eternity will be with Him, And knowing where you're going to spend eternity, gives hope and confidence to face the trials of today

The resurrection demonstrated how powerful God is. And that AWESOME POWER is the same power that God wants to unleash in you – so you can keep going. ***"How tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God. That power is the same divine energy which was demonstrated in Christ when He was raised from the dead."*** Ephesians 1:20 (Phillips)

If God can raise Jesus from the dead, then He can handle any problem I give Him. There is no problem too big. But you say, "You don't know my finances." God does. "You don't know my health problem. God does. You don't know my financial problem... how my marriage is *that* far away from divorce." God does. And He specializes in hopeless cases. That's the power of Easter.

Remember the little boy who said, "Dad, thank you for tomorrow"? If you know Jesus, you can say, "Heavenly Father, thank you for tomorrow!" In the opened tomb, Jesus conquered sin, death, Satan. He conquered fear, fatigue, and failure. He gives hope – hope to start over; hope to keep going; HOPE ... when you need it most! AMEN