

## Greater Hope | Matthew 27.62-28.15

### Introduction | Jesus is dead

The **Resurrection of Jesus** is the most important event in the history of the world. 2000ish years ago, God became a Jewish man, lived 30 years of relative obscurity as a Galilean carpenter, and walked around the middle-east for 3 years preaching, teaching, and performing miracles. At the beginning of the last week of His life, he entered the city of Jerusalem heralded as a King by thousands. By Thursday evening, He had been betrayed, falsely accused, abandoned by his friends. On Friday, he was mocked, beaten, and brutally crucified at the hands of Roman executioners because of the voices of his own Jewish people. Jesus was a threat to their earthly power, popularity, and prosperity. By sunset on Friday evening, Jesus of Nazareth was dead and everyone knew it. The governor Pilate thought he was dead, the Jews who delivered thought he was dead, the soldiers who executed him thought he was dead, the women who helped bury him in a rich man's tomb thought he was dead. **Jesus of Nazareth died.**

On Saturday, with Jesus' lifeless body safely buried, the murdering Jewish leaders found themselves full of fear. They didn't believe the gigantic stone, designed to thwart grave-robbers, was enough to stop Jesus' zealous disciples from stealing the body and concocting a resurrection story. They took extra measures by marking the grave with an imperial seal and setting guards. **On Sunday, the tomb was empty.** Early that morning, battle-hardened professional soldiers had wet their armor and run after watching an angel descend and open Jesus tomb. Fooled by fisherman, and fearing for their lives, the soldiers go into the city and tell the priests what happened. Murderers become conspirators as they pay the soldiers hush money and invent their own story about sneaky disciples and sleeping soldiers. And as Matthew states: **this story has been spread among the Jews to this day (Matt 28.15).** Their story is more unbelievable than the truth: **Jesus rose bodily from the dead and walked out of his tomb alive.**

One of the greatest evidences for Jesus resurrection is the radical change in his disciples. The Resurrection is the event that transformed confused, heartbroken, and fearful cowards into *courageous leaders and martyrs*. Through their radical lives and their fantastic deaths, we see how their unshakable belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ gave them something more powerful than life. That "something" was hope. Hope is powerful. Simply defined, hope is conviction derived from the certainty of something happening (or not happening). These kinds of expectations can greatly influence, even govern, how we think, feel, perceive, and act. **Christian hope is fundamentally different than the hope found in the world.**

### Great Hope | hoping in hope

**There is a difference between GREAT HOPE and A GREATER HOPE.** Before the crucifixion, the disciples had GREAT HOPE. The disciples had certain expectations based on what they could see and understand. Despite Jesus' plain language, **they did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead because they never expected him to die.** Like other Jews, they expected the Messiah to arrive and establish an earthly kingdom. And, as the first followers of the Messiah, they expected to share His reign with Him. They expected Jesus to depose the hypocritical religious leaders; they expected Jesus to overthrow idolatrous Rome; they expected Jesus to assume the throne of David. They believed this so strongly that, as they shared Passover with Jesus, they argued over who would be regarded as greatest in Jesus royal entourage. The disciples had great hope. And their past experiences, up until Friday, led them to believe that everything they expected would come true. Jesus turned water into wine. Jesus caused the blind to see. Jesus helped the lame to walk. Jesus walked on water. Jesus fed thousands of people with a kid's lunch.

Jesus healed the sick from miles away. Jesus brought the dead to life. **But all of their hopes were earthly; all of their expectations based on their own understanding; all of their plans self-concerned.**

But within hours of singing with Jesus, wondering about their place in his court, all earthly hope died. Within hours, they watched their King betrayed by a friend, secretly arrested, and falsely accused. After a few more hours more, they watched their teacher condemned before religious and political leaders, tried illegally, and sentenced to die. By morning, he is stripped of his clothing, mocked, spit on, and beaten, only to have to carry a heavy cross to where they will hang him on it. Finally, his disciples cringe as they spike their Lord on that cross atop a hill called Golgotha. Then, they watch in horror as Jesus life drains away, all while Roman soldiers play games for his clothes. **Even though things had gone exactly as God planned, and as Jesus predicated, his disciples were perplexed.**

When we find ourselves in circumstances that we do not expect or want, our first thought is that this can't be right—*this is NOT how it is supposed to be*. We begin to wonder whether God may have failed us. **In truth, just because men fail, spouses fail, pastors fail, churches fail, or governments fail, doesn't mean God failed.** If we're not careful, when things do not come to pass as anticipated, *we will ask what is wrong with God instead of asking what was wrong with our expectations of Him*. **When Jesus falls short of your expectations for life, know that the problem is not with Jesus.** There is nothing wrong with disappointment, but if it leads to total devastation, it's likely your hope was in something earthly—it was too important.

At the core, God uses these kinds of experiences to reveal the true source of our hope—**whether it is based on our reason or His revelation**.. Those who place GREAT HOPE on the things of this world are characterized by one thing: FEAR. Like the Jewish leaders, the soldiers, even the disciples through Saturday, those who do not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus were governed by fear. Essentially, they are *afraid of losing whatever they expect will or should happen*. When it appears as if that hope will not happen, *they sin in an effort to make it happen* and not lose whatever has become so important.

### **Great Hopelessness | despairing in hope**

Sometimes sin works to “save” that hope...at least temporarily. *But, when the idol we hoped in dies, when our greatest fear has been realized, we find ourselves experiencing GREAT HOPELESSNESS*. This is what the disciples experienced beginning on Friday night through Saturday. All of the disciples fled while other men buried the body of the man they followed for three years. On the cross, their expectations and any hope they had died too. Perhaps they got together on Saturday, maybe they sat alone. I imagine some cried in despair, some shook their fists in anger, but most of them silently stared in shock. **WHAT JUST HAPPENED? How could they had been so wrong? Had the last three years of their life been a waste?**

Saturday was depressing and characterized by hopelessness. The absence of hope is as powerful as its presence—hopelessness transforms the disciples. *Deep conviction gives way to doubt. Close community gives way to isolation.. Optimism gives way to antagonism*. This is no more evident than in the life of one disciple named Thomas. In the gospel of John, chapter 20, a resurrected Jesus appears to 10 of his disciples who are gathered in fear of the Jews. It is Sunday evening, some women have reported seeing Jesus, but the disciples are still hiding behind locked doors unsure and scared. Then a resurrected Jesus comes and stands among them. **John notes that Thomas was not there.** They Bible doesn't say why Thomas is not there or where he is. But he is not with his brothers.

The next day, the disciples ran to find him and said, “We have seen the Lord...he’s as alive as you are!” But Thomas is cold. His response to them sounds like someone who could care less about what they experienced. *“WHATEVER. Jesus is dead. Maybe not to you...but to me. God didn’t come through for me. IT’S OVER. I gave him three years to him, and he didn’t do what I wanted. I am so glad he showed up for you...but not for me. Why didn’t he wait for me to arrive? Why didn’t he come find me? Why isn’t he showing up right now? Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and put my finger on them and in his side; I will never believe.”* When Jesus died, all of Thomas’ hope died with Him. What could have been will never be, and what is not good. Thomas waits for God to prove that his plan is better by showing him the impossible. Thomas was hopelessly justified in rejecting Jesus because of what He didn’t do. **He trusted more in what he desired, than in what Jesus promised.**

### **Greater Hope | hoping against all hope.**

**It would be another week before Thomas’ great hopelessness would give way to a GREATER HOPE.** As most of the disciples rejoiced and worshipped, Jesus let Thomas sit in his despair. I imagine his bitterness grew as did his antagonism toward his newly charismatic brothers who wouldn’t stop talking about Jesus. Somehow, they convinced Thomas to gather with them...in the same place...and Jesus appears again. This time, he addresses Thomas. Here I am Thomas. I heard you Thomas. Touch me and believe Thomas. And as Thomas touches Jesus, He is moved to worship. In response, Jesus says: **Blessed are those who have not seen and believe (John 20.29).** That moment would transform Thomas from a hopeless cynic into a hope-filled church planter and martyr. Thomas is said to have travelled as far as China to preach the gospel, and was martyred by lance and buried in India. What changed? **He had a new and greater hope.**

A GREATER HOPE is what characterizes all the men who met Jesus face to face. They no longer hoped in the things of this world, they did not hope in their own goodness, strength, or wisdom. **They had a greater hope—A HOPE AGAINST HOPE.** Paul uses this phrase when speaking about Abraham in Romans 4. When Abraham was 99 years old, married to a barren woman, God made him a promise. Considering what he could see about himself and his aging wife, this was a hopeless promise. **<sup>18</sup> In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” <sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. <sup>20</sup> No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” <sup>23</sup> But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. **It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4.18-25****

The truth of the Resurrection gives me hope when there is no reason to reasonably have it! **When reality falls short of expectations, the Christian does not ask “What am I going to do now” BUT “What is God doing now?”** The world’s hope is based on what is seen; Christian hope is based on what is unseen. The world’s hope is based on what can be reasoned; Christian hope is based on what is revealed. The world’s hope is based on things that can be lost; Christian hope on that which can’t be taken away. A greater hope is a hope that sees beyond the loss of Friday, gets you through the depression of Saturday, and fills you with the joy of life on Sunday. **It is a hope in a living Savior who never ceases to declare that, even if you lose everything in this world, I will never lose you.**

**The Resurrection gives me hope to be believed when there is no hope to be seen.** I'm not hoping in my goodness, but his grace. I'm not hoping in my power but his sovereignty. I'm not hoping in my understanding, but his wisdom. I'm not hoping in my relationships, but in His love. I'm not even hoping in this life, but in my future resurrection with Him. The Resurrection gives me hope in conquering my sin. The Resurrection gives me perspective in my disillusionment. The Resurrection gives me strength in enduring my suffering. The Resurrection gives me genuine joy in facing my death.

### **Conclusion: Hope that is living**

If Jesus is dead and the Resurrection is fabricated, then sin is condemning, suffering has no meaning, and death is terrifying. If Jesus is dead, there is nothing to look forward to—this is all there is. But in fact Jesus is raised—there is infinitely more than this—and there is everything to look forward, nothing to lose, and everything to gain. **Jesus is alive and the empty tomb reminds us that nothing can take away our hope, not time, not poverty, not hardship, not sin, not persecution, not even death—if our hope is in HIM.**

The power of our hope is that it is greater than every possible unfulfilled expectation in this life. Ours is a living hope that abides with us in this life and in the next. <sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* <sup>4</sup> *to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,* <sup>5</sup> *who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* <sup>6</sup> *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,* <sup>7</sup> *so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* <sup>8</sup> *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,* <sup>9</sup> *obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* 1 Peter 1.3-9.

Today we will all leave here either fearful or joyful, doubtful or confident, hope-filled or hopeless. And the difference is **whether or not you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.**