**EASTER SUNDAY 2017**

**BORN AGAIN TO A LIVING HOPE**

**1 Peter 1:3-4**

**INTRODUCTION**

We live in a digital age. It’s the age of social media, the so-called age of connectivity. There are countless ways to stay in touch with family and friends not just daily, not just by the minute, but by the second. The latest Facebook stats show that it has 1.86 billion active users. In this age of connectivity, you would expect that our generation, out of all the generations that have come before us, would be the least lonely generation.

But the reality is, we are not the least lonely generation. Our generation is not characterized by satisfying friendships and relationships, but by the lack thereof. This is one of the reasons why millions of people feel depressed. They feel like life is empty. They feel like life is barely worth living.

What’s the solution to this epidemic of meaninglessness and loneliness? Is it drugs? Is it more social media? Is it real, face-to-face relationships? One clinical psychiatrist, writing for popular magazine *Psychology Today*, says that, at the bottom, what we need in this age of depression is something all of us are familiar with, but not all of us have. He says we need hope. This is what he writes:

If I could find a way to package and dispense hope, I would have a pill more powerful than any antidepressant on the market. Hope, is often the only thing between man and the abyss. – Dr. Dale Archer, Clinical Psychiatrist

What is hope, this pill more powerful than any antidepressant on the market? Hope always has two components: an object, and a basis. The object is something we want but don’t have, usually a future goal or event. We “hope *for*” the object, whether it be a spouse, a good job, or the Leafs beating the Capitals.

The basis is the reason why we believe that the desired future goal or event will be fulfilled. We “hope *in*” the basis. So if we hope *for* a spouse, we hope *in* our good looks, or our personality, or our match-making friends. If we hope *for* a good job, we hope *in* our education, our personal networks, or our life experience. If we hope *for* a Leafs’ series win, we hope *in* Auston Matthews.

Sometimes hope is all people have as they endure difficult trials. When we’re suffering from cancer, often the only thing we can do is hope for healing, and we put our hope in the medical staff caring for us. When our business is losing money, we hope for a turn around, and we put our hope in our hard work or just plain luck. And when we’re lonely, we hope for a special person to come into our life to fill the emotional void, hoping in whatever gods of love there may be to aim their cupid arrows at the right person.

But this raises the question: are we hoping for the right things, and are we hoping in the right things? I think we have all experienced the disappointments of both. The things that we hope for are often things that cannot satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts. We hope for that special person in our lives, or we hope for a better income. They may make us happy for a time, but only for a time. It is only a matter of time until we start looking for the next thing to bring us fulfillment. And the things that we hope in are things that inevitably fail us. We hope in our hard work to turn our business around, but then our health fails us. We hope in the doctors to cure us, but even the finest of human medicine has its limits. These hopes promise life, but too often they deliver only death.

Easter Sunday points us to a greater hope: a living hope. Easter Sunday shows us a hope *for* a future that will satisfy every longing soul, a future so great and so glorious, that nothing else we can hope for in this world can compare. And Easter Sunday shows us a hope *in* a person that will never fail us: Jesus Christ. Jesus is no longer dead. He is risen! And as he lives, he now gives to us a living hope: a living hope for a glorious future, in a glorious Saviour.

**Read 1 Peter 1:3-9**

The title of this message is **Born Again to a Living Hope**. My aim today is to show you that **Living Hope Comes From a Living Saviour.** We will have three points today:

1. Hope in a Living Saviour
2. Hope from a Living Spirit
3. Hope for a Living Inheritance

(1) **HOPE IN A LIVING SAVIOUR**

Our text today begins in verse 3 with the Apostle Peter’s joyful expression of praise to God: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” Right away, Peter shows us the application, or the practical effect, of what he’s about to say next. What he’s about to say is meant to lead us to worship.

Peter continues in verse 3 with the truths that are meant to lead us to worship: “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.” There are so many rich blessings in this verse that we will think about throughout this sermon, precious phrases like “born again” and “living hope”. For now, I just want to focus on how these rich blessings come to us. It is *through* the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we have a living hope. Christ’s resurrection is the sure and solid foundation of our hope and the center of our worship of God.

This is what we have come here to celebrate on this Easter Sunday. We have come to sing and to proclaim that “Jesus is Risen!” Jesus was mocked and jeered, beaten and flogged, crucified and abandoned. Jesus died. But dead he remains no longer. The one who was buried is no longer in his tomb. The stone is rolled away, and the tomb is empty! God the Father has raised his Son to life, that he might reign forever at his right hand. The God who died is now the God who rose again.

This incomparably glorious truth is meant to lead us, not just to ponder and reflect, but to worship. We are to worship the Father for raising our dear Saviour, and we are to worship the Son for defeating the power of sin and death through his resurrection.

There are many who do not respond to this glorious truth with worship. Some do not worship because they do not believe. Others do not worship because they don’t really care if the resurrection is true. They admire the resurrection, but only like they would admire a powerful story. We watch films and read books all the time that deeply impact us, and what matters to us is not whether the stories are true, but how they affect us. They say the same of the resurrection. They say, “It doesn’t matter if it happened or didn’t happen. What matters is the difference it makes in my life.”

But what if God said that the resurrection actually happened? That would make a big difference, wouldn’t it? If God said the resurrection happened, and you say “Well…it may have or it may not have”, you’re either saying that God is a liar, or that what God says doesn’t matter. Either way, your attitude reflects a profound disrespect for God.

The reality is that God has said that Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead. God also says that if Jesus didn’t actually rise from the dead, we’re all wasting our time here, because without the resurrection, Christianity is a false religion that ought not to be followed. And the way God says these things to us through the Bible. The Bible is God’s Word. What it says, God says. And so, if God says that Jesus rose from the dead in the Scriptures, we can either believe it and take God at his word, or we disbelieve it and reject God as a liar. This is what the Bible says about the resurrection:

“And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain… But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Cor. 15:14, 20)

The Bible doesn’t give us the option of saying, “whether the resurrection happened or not doesn’t matter. What matters is how the story affects me.” The Bible tells us to either believe the resurrection or disbelieve it. For those who believe that the Scriptures are God’s Word, the fact that it says that Jesus rose from the dead is enough for us to believe. We believe the Scriptures because we believe God, and we need no further proof. But for those who do not believe that the Scriptures are God’s Word, there are many good reasons apart from the Bible to believe that Jesus’ resurrection was a historical fact. Let me take you through some of them.

No serious scholar doubts that Jesus actually died on a cross, and that he died at a time when the political powers had a vested interested in showing that Jesus died and stayed dead. Jesus was a subversive figure who made the Jews unhappy, and the Romans really didn’t want the Jews to be unhappy. That’s why the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate, agreed to Jesus’ crucifixion in the first place. He did it to appease the Jews. Rome wanted Israel as an ally, and the death of Jesus was a gift to strengthen that relationship.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ would have turned the world upside down. The Jews would be stuck with a man who claimed to be the Messiah, and yet seemed to do away with so many of their laws and traditions. The Romans would be stuck with a man who claimed power over all earthly authorities, including Caesar himself, and now had demonstrated power over death itself. Therefore, both wanted him dead, and both wanted him to stay dead. So they killed him, made sure he was dead by piercing his side with a spear, buried him in a tomb, and posted a heavy guard around it.

Let’s assume that the disciples fabricated the resurrection. This ragtag collection of fishermen, tax collectors, and the like, would have had to kill the seasoned soldiers, roll the stone away, and steal away Jesus’ body, in order to start a false religion.

One can think of a few reasons why someone would decide to start a false religion: seize political power, gain influence, or increase in wealth. Jesus’ disciples had none of this, and they had no ambitions to seize any of it. They didn’t seem to obtain or want to obtain any earthly gain. On the contrary, their faith in Christ would cost them everything. Tradition tells us that all the apostles were executed except John, many of them in horrific ways.

Why would a bunch of 1st century Jews start a false religion based on the false news that Jesus had risen from the grave, only to willingly go to their graves for that alleged lie? It makes no sense, and because it makes no sense, the majority of scholars today, Christian and non-Christian, accept that the early Christians actually believed that Jesus rose physically from the grave. The resurrection was not a grand hoax concocted by the first Christians. They taught it, because they believed.

That leaves us with two possible explanations for their belief in the resurrection: either the disciples were all hallucinating, or they were telling the truth. There’s a basic principle in the study of history that says we ought to accept an event as historical if it gives the best explanation for the evidence surrounding it.

The evidence is that the disciples believed the resurrection, devoted their lives to telling others about it, and were willing to die for it. There’s two possible explanations: mass hallucination, or truth. Did they suffer a mass hallucination? Some have tried to defend that theory, saying that the hundreds of people who testified to seeing Jesus in the flesh after his death had only seen a figment of their imagination. Theoretically, I assume that a mass hallucination is possible, but is it the best explanation? We’re talking about hundreds of people all willing to stake their lives on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mass hallucinations don’t have that kind of power to deceive so many to such a degree that they become willing to die for the hallucination. So if the disciples weren’t lying, and they weren’t hallucinating, that only leaves one explanation: the resurrection actually happened.

A living hope must begin with belief in the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are born again to a living hope *through* the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is the basis for the living hope, because it is through the resurrection that Jesus Christ has shown that he has decisively defeated all evil in the world which make our future bleak in the first place.

Our sin makes us live in such a way that we hurt others and we hurt ourselves. It separates us from God, the source of all that is good, the One who leads us in the paths of wisdom and righteousness. The resurrection testifies that sin is defeated.

Satan and his demons scheme and plot against us, making us believe lies about God and about ourselves. They condemn us, they accuse us, they tell us we are worthless, and they do it in such a way that we believe it. The resurrection testifies that Satan is defeated.

And the last enemy, death itself, afflicts us constantly throughout this life. We see its corruption in loved ones who have died, and we feel its darkness in the weakness of our own bodies. The resurrection testifies that death is defeated.

We will continue to struggle with sin, Satan will continue to whisper his lies, and unless Jesus returns before we die, all of us must walk through the doorway of death. But because of the resurrection, we can know that, though we may suffer for a little while, we will not suffer for long. Sin, Satan, and death have been decisively defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

(2) **HOPE FROM A LIVING SPIRIT**

This living hope, however, is not for all. It is offered to all, but many reject it. They would rather submit to sin than bend the knee to God. Indeed, that describes all of us in the natural inclination of our hearts. Apart from the grace of God, all of us would choose sin rather than choose God, because our hearts are so bent out of shape by sin. We need help. We need God to save us. This leads to our second point: hope from a living spirit.

Verse 3 says that God has “caused us to be *born again* to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” When Jesus was raised from the dead, he also raised all who trust in him from spiritual death to spiritual life. His resurrection has led to our resurrection, and now we are spiritually “born again”.

Jesus says in John 3:5-6:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

All of us have been born once. Our mothers gave birth to us, and now we live. Our bodies were formed inside their bodies, and their physical bodies gave birth to our physical bodies. We have all been born physically to live a physical existence. Jesus is saying in John 3 that there is another way that we must be born, for there is another way we must live. We need to be born again spiritually, so that we may have spiritual life. And this second birth, a spiritual birth, can only come from the Holy Spirit.

This leads us to a crucial implication that we must understand if we are to understand what it means to be born again. The need for us to be born again spiritually implies that, until we are born again, we are not spiritually alive. Indeed, we are spiritually dead. There’s something missing in each of us, something wrong with human nature, that prevents us from living the lives God intended us to live.

Have you ever had a moment where you thought to yourself, “Tonight, I’m going to put away my phone, shut off the TV, and spend some time with the Lord in prayer”, but when you’re done work, or the kids are in bed, and the evening finally comes around, you find yourself procrastinating – cleaning up, reading the news, planning for the next day, answering e-mails – until you’re so tired that you tell yourself, “There’s no point praying. My mind is too tired. I’ll try again tomorrow.” But the next day is much the same, and the day after that, until you finally stop trying.

We blame it on being too busy. We blame it on being too tired. These may contribute, but they’re not the heart of the problem. The heart of the problem is that, apart from Christ, we are spiritually dead. We do not desire God the way we should. We do not look for God in the places we should. Our hearts are meant to incline upwards towards God, but instead they bend inwards on ourselves. We do what we want to do, not what God wants us to do. And if God doesn’t help us accomplish our goals and satisfy our desires, then we want nothing to do with him.

We cannot have a living hope while we are in a state of spiritual death. Until we are born again, our hope will always be in ourselves. And those who have tried to put their hope in themselves will know that such a hope is not a living hope. It is a dead hope, for we are unable to fulfill our hopes by our own efforts.

So how are we born again to a living hope? Verse 3 tells us: “*he* has caused us to be born again to a living hope…” God is the one who raises us from spiritual death to spiritual life, not us. We did not give physical birth to ourselves, and we cannot give spiritual birth to ourselves. God must do it. He must give us life. The dead cannot raise themselves. It is impossible. But with God, nothing is impossible. God can raise those who have died physically, and God can raise those who have died spiritually.

This doesn’t mean that we become passive, waiting for God to change us while we sit and do nothing. The truth that only God can cause us to be born again is meant to lead us to cry out to God to change us, as we recognize that only he can change us. We cannot change ourselves. This shouldn’t make us passive. It should make us turn to God in humble, desperate dependence, trusting him to do what we cannot do ourselves.

And God has shown that he can do what we cannot do ourselves. We know that he can raise us to spiritual life because he has raised Jesus Christ to life. Verse 3 says, “He has caused us to be born again to a living hope *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*.”

God has chosen to tie our fate to the fate of his Son. What Jesus accomplished, he accomplished on our behalf. All the benefits we receive in the gospel are given to us because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We die to the power and penalty of sin because Jesus died. We receive a spiritual resurrection, and anticipate a future physical resurrection, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we put our trust in Christ, we are united to Christ by faith, so that we receive all the benefits of his death and resurrection. As Romans 6:5 says,

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Whether you have already been born again or you remain in spiritual darkness, all of us need Jesus: we need his death, and we need his resurrection. We need his death to pay the penalty for our sins, so that we may be forgiven and reconciled to God. And we need his resurrection to raise us to spiritual life, that we may seek God, desire God, and live for God the way we were meant to. All the bounties of Jesus’ death and resurrection are offered to everyone as a free gift. We do not need to earn it. We do not need to deserve it. All God calls us to do is to turn away from our sin and turn towards him, recognizing that we need Jesus to save us, and trusting that Jesus has saved us. When we do, God pardons all our sins, raises us to spiritual life, and brings us into a loving relationship with himself forever.

And when we may be tempted to doubt that God has truly raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life, we must look back to the resurrection of our Saviour. There, as we behold the empty tomb, we find assurance that God has the power of resurrection. We know we can be raised because Jesus was raised, and now the same power that raised Jesus from the dead abides in us, giving us spiritual vitality and strength.

(3) **HOPE FOR A LIVING INHERITANCE**

Now, finally, we can look at what we are hoping *for*. We have seen that, once God raises us from spiritual death to life, we put our hope *in* Jesus Christ and his resurrection. Jesus Christ and his resurrection are the basis of our hope. Now we look to the object of our hope, leading to our third point: hope for a living inheritance.

Look at verse 3 again and continue on to verse 4: God “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you…”

In verse 4, Peter doesn’t yet tell us what we’re hoping for. Instead, he gives us five qualities of that hope.

First, our hope is called an inheritance. Who receives an inheritance? The children of the one giving the inheritance! Like any inheritance, no one deserves it. No one has to earn it. It is a free gift given to us because, through Christ, all who trust in him have been adopted as God’s children.

Second, our hope is “imperishable”. That’s another way of saying it lasts forever. Peter doesn’t say this, but rather speaks in the negative, to contrast our hope with all other hopes. All other hopes are perishable. They die. They have expiry dates. But our hope, our living hope, does not. It is imperishable.

Third, our hope is “undefiled”. Peter could have just said “pure”, but speaks in the negative again to show us just how different our living hope is. All other hopes are tainted. They disappoint us. They fail us. But our living hope is as pure as clear water, untainted and unblemished by any impurities, able to satisfy the deepest thirsts of our hearts.

Fourth, our hope is “unfading”. It never decreases in glory. Other hopes may satisfy us for a time, but with time, they all fade away. They lose their potency, their beauty, their appeal. Our living hope never diminishes. It never fades away. It remains unfading in its glorious beauty forever.

Fifth, it is kept in heaven for us. God is guarding it in his heavenly domain under lock and key, so that no one can break in and steal it away. God is preserving it for us, until we come before him in heaven and receive this incredible inheritance.

So now, we must ask the final question: what is this incredible inheritance? Is it an eternity of playing little harps, as popular culture always depicts heaven? Is it the pleasure of having whatever we want? Is it the freedom of doing whatever we desire to do?

To find the answer, we must look to the next verse, verse 5: “who by God’s power are being guarded through faith *for a salvation* ready to be revealed in the last time.” We are hoping for salvation: salvation from the justice of God against our sin, and salvation from all of sin’s effects.

We already have salvation, but we do not yet possess it in full. When we put our trust in Christ, we are truly saved. Nothing can change that. Nothing can take it away. But though we have it, we do not yet possess it in full. The fullness of our salvation is still to come. We have salvation like we have the love of our loved ones when they are apart from us. We know they love us, and we know that nothing can change that love. But we will not truly have the full effect of their love in our lives until they are with us once again.

All we need to do is look at our continued struggle with sin, Satan, and death to know that we do not yet possess salvation in full. There is still great pain in this world. None of us are exempt from it. Christ has defeated all his enemies through his death and resurrection, but they are still in their death throes. They lash about even as they descend towards certain defeat, seeking to destroy as much as they can, until they finally breathe their last.

But the greatest evidence of the reality that we do not yet possess salvation in full is that we are not yet with the lover of our souls. We are on earth, but Jesus is in heaven. We know he loves us, but there is so much more of his love to know and enjoy that we cannot know and enjoy until we are with him. But when the fullness of salvation comes, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will come in all his fullness, and he will be with us, and we with him, for all of eternity.

Jesus himself is our living hope. We hope for the fullness of salvation, because we hope for him. Verse 5 speaks of a “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” But look at verse 7. It says that, after we have endured the trials of this life, our faith will result “in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” As the fullness of our salvation is revealed, the fullness of Christ himself will be revealed, and we will finally enjoy fellowship with our risen Lord forever.

**CONCLUSION**

Jesus is our living hope. He is both the object of our hope and the basis of our hope, the One we trust and the One we long for. We hope in Christ as we hope for Christ, waiting for the blessed day when we see him face to face. And as we hope for him, we know that we will have him, because our Saviour has risen from the dead.

This is the living hope that will not disappoint us. This is the living hope that will never fail to satisfy us. This hope, and this hope alone, gives us the kind of life, joy, and peace that we need to endure through the struggles of this life.

I cannot close with words more powerful than those found in verses 8-9:

“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, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Today, on this Easter Sunday, let us put our hope in Christ as we hope for Christ. Let us live with a living hope in a living Saviour, for he has conquered the grave.