

BELPRES CHURCH

Easter Sunday Upside Down Hope

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Transcript:

Holy Spirit, use this time to help us understand the power of Jesus' resurrection and what it means in our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.

Well, one of the things I love about my wife is she's very practical. She is not sentimental in the least. She's just super practical, which I love. A couple years ago, I was getting ready to go to work and I suddenly just passed out. Don't know why. Hit the floor cold. Completely passed out. When I woke up, my wife was standing there screaming and when I moved, she said, "Oh, thank goodness. I thought you were dead." I thought, "Oh great. Now what are we going to do?" What you thought I was dead and your first thought is a practical financial question not a laugh? The love of my life is gone. But I had I really been dead, the grief would have come I'm almost positive that it would happen and that's just her being her. That's her being super practical and it's kind of her way of saying, "I love you." It's her love language.

Do you ever find yourself asking that question? "Oh, great. Now what am I going to do?" Because Easter answers that question. Because Easter is all about hope in seemingly hopeless situations and not a cheesy sentimental hope, but a rugged, real hope, that takes account of the real pain in our world. Easter gives us an upside down hope; a counterintuitive hope. Because see that the fact that Jesus, who is God in the flesh was raised from the dead, that first Easter 2,000 years ago, what it shows is that he turns hopeless things upside down and makes them filled with hope. Makes them the very vehicles through which hope comes. But it's also not just when things are bad. Even when life is great, everything is going well with Jesus, there's always even more and he expands life, even when things are great, into the fullness of life.

For the last two years, the entire world has been asking, "Oh great. Now what do we do?" Because of the pandemic. Two years ago, when everything was just shutting down because of COVID, I was actually in Rwanda and I was on the phone several times a day with our executive pastor, Annie, because we were having to make a lot of decisions. And she said at one point she said, "Just think Scott, we'll shut down for a while and then when everyone comes back at Easter, it'll be such a great celebration." She meant Easter 2020, and here we are now two years later, finally able to be together again. Thank you, whoever did that. Nine o'clock didn't do that. That's awesome.

When we look at the economy, or war in Ukraine, or divisions in our family, or we look at our politicians and think, "Oh great. Now what are we going to do?" Maybe you would hope to be married by now, or have more friends, or get into a certain college or get a certain job, or maybe the doctor's report would've been better than it was. Or, maybe things are going great. Either way, Jesus meets us, in the hard times and in the great times to expand our lives. Jesus turns hopeless upside down into hope.

So for instance, Jesus resurrection means that death is the doorway to new life and that's kind of upside down from what we think. We think no dead is dead. That's it? That's the end. One of the things I love about Easter hope is it starts with a hopeless event. Easter hope does not say, "Don't worry. It's going to be okay." It says, "Actually maybe not and maybe even worse than you think. Happy Easter." Aren't you glad you came today.

But Jesus resurrection means he takes hopeless and turns it upside down. He turned death upside down to bring new life, starting with us. Jesus was crucified to pay the price for our sins, that deep down we know needs to be paid or there's no justice in the world. And that word sin is kind of a tough word for us because we kind of think of ourselves as good people. But deep down, we kind of know, right? We know that we heard people. We do things that we're ashamed of. We hope no one finds out about. And if someone suggests that maybe we're not a good person, we get really defensive all of a sudden, because deep down we know. And so we're often haunted by the question, am I good enough? Am I a good enough student? Am I a good enough parent? Am I a good enough person? Good enough? Am I good enough to get into heaven, person?

The gospel, the bad news that the Bible tells us is actually no. No. None of us are good enough and I've got plenty of data to show that I am not a good person. Lots of data on me. You know, follow the science. Not a lot of science. It says I am not a good person. But the good news of Jesus is, you don't have to be.

Bono, the lead singer of the band U2, and I have to identify him because this week I had a college student tell me that she didn't know who Bono is. This is what's wrong with our universities. They're not teaching what people really need to know. Bono says that what attracted him to Jesus was the difference between grace and karma. So he says this. He says, "Karma is this idea that the bad stuff you do comes back to bite you and it probably should because what you did needs to be punished. But with Jesus, along comes this idea called grace, that upends all that as you reach, so you will sow stuff. Love interrupts the punishment for your bad actions, which in my case, is very good news because I've done a lot of stupid stuff. I'd be in big trouble if karma was going to be my judge. I'm holding out that Jesus took the punishment for my sins on the cross because I know who I am and I hope I don't have to depend on my own goodness. What that means is I'm forgiven and free of shame."

Death is a doorway to new life. In lots of ways, I think of marriages that are in trouble and that have been revived into great marriages. But first in order for that to happen, some things needed to die first. See, resurrection is great but the problem with resurrection is you first need a crucifixion. So sometimes old things have to die. Old ways of communicating, old behaviors, old sins had to die so that marriage could be resurrected into something that was amazing.

Death is a doorway to new life and that includes physical death, which is good news, because we're all going to die. Hope you knew that coming in today. We're all... Hope that's not surprise to you. We're all going to die. The human mortality rate these days is about one per person-ish, more or less. But if we put our faith in Jesus, we will be raised to new life after we die, just like he was and there are good reasons to believe he really was raised from the dead and it's not a made up story.

Folks back then would never have made up a story where the women would've been the first witnesses of the resurrection because their testimony was not respected. Hundreds of people died saying they saw Jesus alive again. People will die for a lot of things, not something they know that they made up. There actually lots of reasons to believe that this really happened and we've listed those on our website at bellpress.org/easter. I'd invite you to read those when you get home. Not now I'm preaching but when you get home. I hope you read it because when you know that you will be raised to new life after you die because of Jesus, that makes you invincible. You're not even afraid of death. What's going to stop you? Which leads to a bigger life because then you're willing to risk a lot to be part of healing this world, in Jesus name.

That's why the early Christians took care of plague victims when no one else would because they weren't afraid to die. It's why followers of Jesus have been at the forefront of abolition, civil rights, hospitals, all kinds of things. Now, not all people who say they're Christian did those

things, but they should have, if they're following Jesus. And the people who really believe in resurrection, they do those things because they're not afraid of anything, not even death.

See resurrection will always get you in trouble in all the right ways. It will make you dangerous to the devil's plans. You are made for so much more than just grabbing at success, or popularity, or pleasure. You were made on purpose, for a purpose, to partner with Jesus in healing this world, this huge adventure. In fact, that's what got Jesus killed. He challenged the status quo. In our culture, we kind of reduce Jesus down to this nice guy, but here's the thing. Nobody gets crucified for being nice. Nobody said, "Oh look. He's so nice. Let's crucify him." No. He said, "The first shall be last. The last shall be first." That's upside down. He said the most important thing wasn't Caesar. It was relationship with God. He put lowly fishermen in charge of spreading his kingdom instead of the well-credentialed seminary, educated religious leaders.

That's the sort of thing that can get you killed. And it did. It's also the sort of thing that can bring new life, which his resurrection did. See, Jesus' goal is not nice people. His goal is new people, who are becoming like him and partnering with him, in healing this world. I'll give you a story later about a guy that's doing that.

Second Easter hope. Second Easter hope is that the threat becomes the promise with Jesus.

Also, upside down, we think the threat is the threat. The enemy is the enemy. But sometimes the thing you think is your enemy can actually turn out to be your friend. My nephew once took an art course and he painted a seascape and he actually won an award for this particular seascape and the teacher said, "You painted the ocean with this unique shade of purple. I've never seen it before. You're so pretty with color." Actually, no. He's color-blind. He thought it was blue.

See, the thing that you think is your enemy, sometimes turns out to be your friend and works for you. The Bible says that Jesus having disarmed the powers and authorities, made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Triumphant by the cross.

That is a contradiction in terms. It's upside down. It'd be like saying he triumphed by dying in the electric chair. Being crucified does not look like triumph. It looks like defeat but Easter hope says that things aren't always what they seem to be. Jealous religious leaders and fearful politicians put Jesus to death to get rid of them but it did the exact opposite. It bounced back on them like a boomerang and defeated them because the movement they were trying to squash, it just ended up being the fastest growing exploded in the fastest growing movement in human history and is still going today.

Jesus turned the threat a upside down into the promise. And when your enemy throws his best punch, and it bounces back on him and defeats him and makes you stronger, that is triumph. The thing meant to destroy, raised up. The thing meant to kill, brought life. The thing meant to be the enemy, Jesus turned into the friend and used it to bring hope. Now, that doesn't mean that we'll never face hard times. We will. Doesn't mean that we're going to win every battle. We won't. But it does mean that we're going to win the war.

I know a woman whose aging mother is requiring a lot of care right now and that's really hard on this woman, especially since she and her mother had always had a very difficult, painful relationship with a lot of tension. But this woman has noticed that caring for her mother has given them opportunities to talk and get to understand each other better and it's creating connections that have never been there before. See, the burden became the vehicle for the blessing. The enemy became the friend. The threat became the promise through which hope came. Death is a doorway to new life. Jesus will turn this threat into the promise.

And third, our strongest hope is what we do not see. And again, upside down. We put our hope in what we can see. My bank account. My degrees. My looks. My health. But some of the strongest forces in the universe are the ones that we can't see. We can't see the force that binds atoms together, atoms to atoms, but it's the force that creates the whole universe. We can't see it, but we see its effects by just looking around. We can't see Jesus, but we can see his effects in our lives. The Bible says, "Hope that is seen is no hope at all. We fix our eyes, not on what is seen, but on what unseen, since what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal."

See, hope needs to be bigger than what we see. Because if what we're putting our hope in is the things we can see. My job, my popularity, my money, my health, what happens when we don't see those things? Then where is our hope? Then where is our hope? We will be disappointed in hope if it's in the things that we can see because those things don't last. But if our hope is in Jesus, he lasts forever. The strongest unseen force there is... The strongest unseen force there is in the universe, is the unseen but very powerful love of Jesus. It conquers is everything.

When my son was little, he resisted going to church. Not when he was older, but when he was little, he really resisted going to church and there would be Sundays where my wife would be trying to get him into church from the parking lot and he would stand in the parking lot and yell, "I hate church. I hate church." Okay, when that's the pastor's kid, that's bad marketing. I don't know, maybe some of you who were dragged here today by a relative, maybe you just did the same thing in the parking lot. "I hate church. I hate church." But here's the thing. By the time my son was in high school, he showed up here every Sunday to help with our preschoolers because

he was loved here, with Jesus' love, by many of you and by his Sunday school teachers. He was loved here and so love won him over in the end.

Let me ask you this. How many Roman emperors can you name? Maybe Augustus, Nero. Maybe Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, if you've seen the movie Gladiator. But how many of you could name Maximus Thrax? Huh? Which is just an awesome name, right? Like I don't know what Thrax means, but whatever it is, he is Maximus Thrax. Way better than Minimus Thrax, but you have never heard of him and I have, because I Googled it. It's the only way I know. Everyone knew their names at the time, because they were the most powerful people around, but nobody, we only remember a handful of them today. However, everyone knows the name of Jesus because the movement, this crucified carpenter started, outlasted all the Roman emperors. His unseen love in the end, proved more powerful than the all too visible means of state terror and power.

I know a man who grew up never knowing his biological parents and he was raised in poverty by a series of foster... In a series of foster homes and when he got married, he had a lot of pain. So he and his wife ended up using drugs to kind of numb the pain and their addiction got so bad at one point, that the state took their youngest daughter away for her protection. Well, that was kind of a wake up call. He got himself into rehab and while he was there, he discovered Jesus, through a friend. This man decided to give Jesus a try. And he said, "Jesus, if you are God, as you claim to be, show me what you can do with this mess I'm in." That is a great prayer. That is a great prayer. And he says from then on, Jesus started to give him supernatural strength, supernatural courage, that eventually enabled he and his wife to get off drugs. Then they worked for a couple of years to get their daughter back, which eventually they did.

Well, here's where the story gets kind of wild and interesting. One week after they got their daughter back, he got a phone call from an adoption agency that said his birth mother would like to meet him and would he be willing? And he said, "Sure." So he'd never seen her before in his life. So they got together and started a relationship. Well, that got him curious about who his father is, so he started to do some research, found his father and connected with his father. Then the father wanted to meet the mother. So after 30 years they met and the father apologized to her for having abandoned her when she was pregnant and they started dating each other and eventually got married. Two generations of family dysfunction, healed.

But it didn't stop there because that all ended up convincing this guy that Jesus could raise just about anything from the dead and so he started an organization that helps dads in under-resourced communities, be better husbands and be better fathers and helps them overcome the obstacles that they face and give them the support they need and advocates for them to be good husbands and good fathers. He's healing so many families through this.

His situation looked dead. Poverty. Addiction. Despair. Jesus turned it upside down to bring new life and Jesus used the threat, that things that threatened him; addiction, poverty. He turned those upside down too, and is now using them to help other people in the same situation because this guy's gone through it, so he knows how to lead him out. The unseen love of Jesus made him a new person and his life is now bigger. A bigger adventure with purpose, meaning, joy, as he partners with Jesus in changing the world. Not going through the motion; a big life.

Now your story's going to be different but if Jesus can do that with him, what can he do in your life and mind? So if you don't know Jesus today, I'd encourage you to get to know him. Read the Bible. Talk to other people. Maybe come back next Sunday and work through some of these questions because we're still wrestling with these questions too. And if you do know Jesus, either way, give him your hopeless places and watch him turn them upside down into hope. But also give them the things in your life that are going great and ask them to expand that into even more meaning, purpose and joy, because Jesus Easter upside down hope works when things are great, as he expands great into the fullness of life. And his hope also works in the hardest places because if it doesn't work there, then what good is it?

Not just hope when you're healthy. Not just hope when there's a house. Not just hope when things are good. Upside down, counterintuitive hope, when you don't know how you're going to make it through, but you can still say, "I don't know how, but I know who." "I don't know when, but I know who." "I don't know what, but I know who."

Because when Jesus exploded out of that tomb, that first Easter, he turned everything upside down. My guilt for his innocence. My weakness for his strength. My death his life. My failure for his victory. He has taken everything that breaks me and has made it to be praised. And there is no failure so final. No defeat so dire. No sorrow so sad. No dream so dead, that he can't turn it upside down and make it live again because he is always resurrection, even when the tomb is sealed. There is no one like our God. There is no one like our God and because he lives, we are unafraid.

Jesus, there is no one like you. There is no one like you. And Lord, we ask that you help us believe in your resurrection and fill us with your power, so that we can walk in a way that makes the whole world know that you live. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.
