

Jesus is Hope | Easter 2026

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Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Turn in your Bibles to John chapter 20.

He arose. Hallelujah, He arose. And because He came out of that grave on the third day, we have what the Scripture calls a living hope. That's what I want to talk to you about today. I want to talk to you about the hope that the resurrection brings.

We're beginning a new series today that we're calling, "So What? Why the Resurrection Matters." Over the course of the next five weeks, we're going to look at some of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in Scripture.

Depending upon how you read the parallel accounts in the Gospels concerning the resurrection, scholars say that there are somewhere between 10 and 12 post-resurrection accounts. Many of these post-resurrection accounts are related to us by eyewitnesses. These appearances of Jesus are the single greatest evidence that we have for the resurrection being a historical fact - that it actually occurred.

Today, we're going to look at the very first post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. It's found in John's Gospel. If you're taking notes, I encourage you to. The title of the message today is "Jesus Is Hope."

Now, we Houstonians know a little about hope, don't we? I mean, it's baseball season, and we're hoping that those 'Stros will bring back a championship to H-Town, all right? It's hope.

Some of you, after this service is over, have kids and grandkids, and you're going to do a little Easter egg hunting. Let me tell you something: Your kids and grandkids are hoping that when they open those eggs, some good candy is in there, all right? Not cheap candy - some good milk chocolate. And if you're one of those families that puts money in random eggs, you're just upping that hope factor significantly.

Look at our world today. Truly, what we are looking for and what we need is hope. We're in this conflict with Iran. Tensions are high. It seems like one misstep and we're headed to World War III, and we're hoping that's just not the case.

I got a phone call this week from some friends, a couple. The husband went in for a regular surgery, something didn't go as planned, and now he's on a ventilator fighting for his life. They're holding on to, clinging to, hope.

I mentioned in our Good Friday evening service that our prison ministry was out at one of the state prisons on Thursday. You talk to those inmates, and I'm telling you, what they need and what they're looking for more than

anything is hope.

It's been said that man can live about 40 days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but only for one second without hope. This is what the first resurrection appearance of Jesus is all about.

I want to read the Scripture, John chapter 20. We'll read the first 18 verses, and then we'll come back and make some points and comments as we reflect on what we have read.

John chapter 20, starting in verse 1, the Bible says this:

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

— John 20:1-4

That's John who's writing this Gospel here. I think it's hilarious that John chooses to etch into the pages of Scripture for all of eternity, "There was a race to the tomb, but I won."

And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.

— John 20:5-8

In case you missed that detail earlier, he had reached the tomb first.

For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples went back to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.

And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.

They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" which means Teacher.

Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that he had said these things to her.

— John 20:9-18

Jesus Is Hope From Our Past

The first point I want to make from this text this morning is that Jesus is hope from our past.

The main person in this text besides the risen Christ is Mary. She's the first person to see the empty tomb. She's the first person to have an encounter with the resurrected Christ. She's the first person to tell others that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

If you know anything about Mary at all, she is the most unlikely candidate to be following Jesus in the first place, much less being the first one to see Him and to announce His resurrection to others.

She's called Mary Magdalene. That's not because Magdalene is her last name. It's because she's from a place called Magdala. Magdala was a small community on the shores of Galilee. It was a blue-collar fishing community.

When we take our trips to Israel, we'll take our groups to Magdala. There's a beautiful chapel, there are some excavations that they've done there, and we have some worship times there. This is where Mary was from - Magdala.

We're first introduced to her in Luke's Gospel. He tells us in Luke chapter 8, verses 1 and 2. It'll be on the screen for you:

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.

And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out.

— Luke 8:1-2

Some scholars believe that Mary was referred to in Luke chapter 7 and described as a prostitute as well. There's no biblical evidence for that, but it's what some suggest, and it really doesn't matter.

What we do know is that Mary was familiar with pain. The Scripture says that she was tormented by, filled with, seven evil spirits - seven demons. Can you imagine the darkness in her life? My goodness, one evil spirit

is enough. She had seven. What a tortured soul she must have been.

We're talking about hope today. When you think about the life that she was living and the life that she was in, you think of anything other than hope. It was hopelessness. She was filled with demons.

Can you imagine? Did they cause depression? Did they make her feel like she was going insane? Did they make her sick? Probably all of that and more.

But then Mary has an encounter with Jesus, and it changes everything. We don't have the details of this encounter. We don't have a record of when it occurred. But she met Jesus, and she was transformed. Jesus changed her life, kicked the demons out, and she followed Jesus for the rest of her life.

She followed Him so closely that all of the Gospel accounts mention that Mary Magdalene was right there at the cross of Jesus when He was being crucified. Listen to John's account:

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

— John 19:25

When all the other disciples tucked tail and ran, when they were hiding for their lives, scared to death, Mary Magdalene was right there at the foot of the cross, right next to the mother of Jesus.

She was the first one to the tomb on that first day of the week all those years ago. In fact, the Bible says:

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark.

— John 20:1

If you know anything about John's writings - his Gospel, three other letters in the New Testament, including Revelation - he uses light and darkness often. He's not just talking about the setting of the day. He uses it as a theological symbol.

It's as if John is saying here, "She appears at the tomb when it's dark." Not just physically, but it's hopeless. When she gets there, she sees that the tomb has been messed with. The stone that had sealed the tomb is now rolled away.

I want you to think about this: Mary, the first eyewitness to the empty tomb, in her past was a demon-possessed wretch.

Now listen, you could be here this morning, and maybe you can't identify with Mary in the fact that in your past you weren't filled with demons. But isn't it true that every single one of us here in this room today, and every single one watching online, has a past? We all have things in our lives that cause us shame and embarrassment. We look back and we regret.

The truth is, some of you look back at your past and think that it somehow disqualifies you from the love and grace and mercy of God.

Maybe it's an addiction of some kind - prescription medication, alcohol, or some kind of substance abuse that

has kept you in bondage and slavery for years. Maybe it's gambling or pornography. I don't know what it is for you.

It could be that you're a workaholic. You're chasing after earthly success. You're chasing after power. You're chasing after position. You've neglected your family and made horrendous decisions. You're thinking about the choices that you've made and the consequences that you're still living with today because of some of those choices, and they haunt you.

Maybe you look at your past and just feel like a failure. A failed marriage. A failed business. You've made promise after promise after promise to God, year after year after year, and you never keep those promises. You look at your life and just feel like a total failure.

I have no idea what's eating at you this morning or what's in your past causing you to live in a cycle of shame, thinking that the Lord has somehow washed His hands of you. But I'm telling you, if we learn anything from Mary being the first eyewitness to the empty tomb, it is that Jesus is hope from our past.

I love that Mary was the first person to see the empty tomb. It wasn't a Pharisee, someone who knew the law backward and forward, obeyed the letter of the law, and did everything on the outside right.

The first person to see the tomb wasn't a disciple in the inner circle - Peter, James, or John - who got to see some amazing things in their lives. Jesus raised people from the dead. They were there at the Mount of Transfiguration.

No, the first person to see the empty tomb is a woman who, in that day, didn't have many rights. She was a woman with a past who knew brokenness and knew darkness.

I'm here to tell you today that just as Jesus was hope from her past, He is hope for your past, no matter what it may be and no matter what is in your rearview mirror that may be holding you back.

The resurrection means there's hope from our past.

Jesus Is Hope in Our Present

Not only is there hope from our past, but Jesus is hope in our present.

Mary doesn't understand what she sees. That's why she goes back and gets Peter and John, and they run to the tomb. If you didn't catch the details, John wins the race, okay? He doesn't want us to forget that.

They look in and see linen cloths lying there. The face cloth that would have been wrapped around His head or placed on His head was folded and neatly put into place.

I love that Scripture gives us that little detail there. What's the lesson in Jesus taking the linen that was covering His face, folding it, and putting it neatly in its place? Kids, the lesson is, "If Jesus can fold His clothes, you can fold yours too," okay?

That's not really the lesson. The reality is that we don't know why that little detail is given. Some scholars

suggest that it was to show that it wasn't grave robbers. Nobody took the body of Jesus. You don't take the time to fold clothes if you're on the steal.

Whatever it means, Jesus was in total control of the situation.

Mary doesn't understand, though. It doesn't make sense. Even though Jesus had told His followers on a number of occasions, "I'm going to Jerusalem. I'm going to be turned over to the authorities there. I'm going to be crucified," Jesus knew exactly what He was going to get into. He told them, "I will rise again."

But dead people don't just come back to life, and Mary is heartbroken.

Remember, she was at the foot of the cross. She saw the nails go into Jesus' hands and feet. She saw Him give up His spirit when He cried, "It is finished." She saw the Roman centurion take the spear and thrust it into His side.

Not only that, but she followed those who put Jesus into the tomb all the way there. She watched it. Matthew's Gospel tells us this:

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus.

He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock.

And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

— Matthew 27:57-61

She saw Jesus die. She saw Jesus placed in the tomb. She saw the stone rolled into its place. When she gets there on Sunday morning to pay her respects and to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, His body is nowhere to be found, and it breaks her heart. She weeps.

Look at what the Scripture says:

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.

And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.

They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

— John 20:11-13

The wording here is that this is loud weeping. This is guttural weeping, all right? There is no quiet crying going on right now. She is weeping in anguish.

Again, a physical resurrection isn't even registering in her mind.

Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

— John 20:14

This could have been that Jesus was keeping her from realizing who He was. Maybe, in the darkness of the night as it was just turning daybreak, and with those tears in her eyes, she couldn't notice it was Him. Maybe it was just that the resurrected body of Jesus, which we know was transformed into glory, looked different.

We don't know, but she was kept from recognizing Him. I think in her mind, after seeing Jesus die and be placed in that tomb, there was no way she was thinking Jesus was standing there. It just blocked out the reality.

But look at verse 15:

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" which means Teacher.

— John 20:15-16

Don't miss this. It was Jesus saying her name that changed everything.

The Greek text tells us that Jesus used her Aramaic name, Miriam, spoken in tenderness in this moment.

You know, there's something about hearing your own name. Dale Carnegie wrote a best-selling book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. His statement in that book is, "A person's name is to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language."

That's true. We love hearing our name. But let's be real today: It's not just in hearing the name. It's the tone in which your name is said.

My sweet wife, Debbie, if she says my name and it's soft and tender, "Jarrett," it's going to be a good day, all right? But if she's sharp and abrupt, "Jarrett!" Uh-oh.

It's not just in saying the name. It's how it's said. I think Jesus, in calling Mary's name in Aramaic, her native tongue, and in the tenderness with which He said it, snapped her into focus and into reality.

I think what's going on in this moment is John chapter 10 being played out in real life. Do you remember that passage? Jesus uses a little object lesson of a shepherd and sheep. Let me read you three verses from John chapter 10:

The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

— John 10:27

I don't know what this says about me. I'm sure some of you do this. Maybe somebody you love in your past has gone on to be with the Lord, and you have voicemails on your phone right now that they left for you.

I have a number of them in my phone right now - mentors, people who meant a lot to me. From time to time, I'll just play those voicemails and listen to their voices.

There's something about hearing that voice and the memories it brings. It just jars you in the moment. You feel emotions at a deep level.

That's from hearing their voice over a phone. I can't imagine if I heard it in real life and turned to see that it was the person I was looking for. We would know exactly, just like Mary, who it was talking to us.

Mary went from grief and despair to joy and wonder in a moment. In one second, at the sound of her name, this woman who knew agony and pain and was weeping, "Where have you taken the body of my Lord?" heard her name. In one second, Jesus changed her present circumstances and gave her hope.

I'm going to come back to this at the end: Jesus, in one moment of calling your name, can change your present circumstances and give you hope.

Jesus is hope from our past. He's hope in our present.

Jesus Is Hope for Our Future

Jesus is hope for our future.

In this passage, Jesus doesn't just show Himself to Mary and leave. He gives her a mission. He gives her a purpose. Look at John 20:17-18:

Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that he had said these things to her.

— John 20:17-18

"Go tell your brothers, the disciples."

Jesus changed Mary's life forever. He changed the disciples' lives forever. But it wasn't just their lives that He changed. He changed their eternity.

This is what He does for me and you. Easter is all about the hope of a future, of us living forever and ever with the Lord. This is why today is so special. It's what makes the resurrection so powerful, because His physical resurrection secures a future life with Him forever and ever.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, "If the resurrection didn't happen, if Jesus is still in the grave, our faith is futile. What we are doing here is pointless. It is vain. It is useless." He says we are, of all people, to be pitied if Jesus is still in the grave.

But we've got news today: Jesus is not still in the grave! Because He arose, we have a future. We have hope.

The Bible calls Jesus our blessed hope. There's a verse in the New Testament book of Titus. Paul is writing to a leader in the early church named Titus. This whole idea of past, present, and future - the hope of Christ - is in just two verses.

Listen to Titus 2:11-13:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.

— Titus 2:11

That's Jesus. That's the past. He appeared.

Training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

— Titus 2:12

That's present.

Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

— Titus 2:13

That's future.

Jesus made a promise to His disciples. He said, "I will rise from the dead." On no fewer than four occasions in the Gospels, Jesus said, "I will be put to death, and then I will rise from the dead."

As we've noted today, He came through on that promise. He kept His word.

Four times He said, "I will rise again." Do you know how many times Jesus promised that He was coming again? Over 20 times. He's keeping His word. The resurrection proves this, and when He comes again, we will live with Him forever and ever.

This is our future hope.

The question that every single one of us in this room has to answer - every single one of us, before you leave today - is this: Do you know this hope?

Hope is not wishful thinking. It is a confident assurance. Hope is not an idea. It is a person, and His name is Jesus.

If you will look to Him by faith, He will do for you what He did for Mary all those years ago. He'll call your name, and He'll give you hope from your past, hope in your present, and hope for your future.

An Invitation to Hope

Would you bow your heads in prayer with me across this room?

Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. I'd just like to ask in this moment that we honor the sacredness of this moment. Nobody be leaving, if at all possible.

As we take a posture of internal reflection with heads bowed, thinking about what we've heard today, we're going to do what we do every single week here at Champion Forest, and that's give you an opportunity to respond to what you've heard today.

I believe there are many in this room who, right now, Jesus is calling by name.

I don't know your story, but I know there are some who walked in here today with little to no hope. You're handcuffed to your past. There's no sense of peace or joy in your present. When you think about a future with God, because you've never trusted in Him and never surrendered your life to Him, there is no hope.

What I want you to hear in this moment, more than anything, is exactly what Mary heard all those years ago. I want you to hear Jesus speaking your name.

Here's the thing: He speaks your name to your heart. I can promise you, Him speaking your name in your heart is louder than any audible voice you've ever heard.

If you're here today and you've never received the Lord Jesus Christ, you've never received hope into your life, never had your sins forgiven, and never surrendered the lordship of your life over to Jesus, I'm going to ask you to do it right now.

You say, "How?"

We say around here that it's as simple as your ABCs.

A, you have to admit that you're a sinner. That takes humility, but that's an easy answer. All of us have sinned. Every single one of us. We don't live up to God's holy character.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

— Romans 3:23

B, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ - who He is. Believe that He was the Son of God, that He came and lived a perfect life, that He went to a cross and died on that cross for our sins, that He was buried, and that on the third day He rose again.

We believe this message not just with our heads, but with our hearts: "God, I'm giving You my life."

C, we confess Him as Lord. That's simply a cry saying, "Lord, I believe. Save me."

The Bible says in Romans chapter 10, verse 13 - and this is a promise:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

— Romans 10:13

It's a beautiful principle taking place right here. Jesus is calling your name. You hear it in your heart. You know you need to respond and give Jesus your life.

He's calling your name, and then we, by faith, when we hear Him calling our name, call on His name. And He saves us.

If you need to call on the name of Jesus, I'm going to lead you in what we call a prayer of salvation, a prayer of repentance. There's nothing magical or mystical about this prayer. It's not the prayer that saves you. It's God who saves you.

He sees your heart, your humility, and your faith being expressed.

If you want to receive hope into your life today, if you want to pray and ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, and you've never done that before but want to do it today, I'm going to ask you to pray. Christians, you're praying. But for those who are calling on the name of the Lord because you heard Jesus call your name, I'm going to put a prayer on the screen. I want you to pray it in your heart. Mean it with everything you've got.

"Jesus, I know I'm a sinner, and I need a Savior. I believe You are my only hope."

Just pray it in your heart.

"I ask You to forgive my sin and be the Lord of my life. I believe You died on a cross. I believe You were buried and raised back to life. I place my trust in You today."

If you're praying that prayer with me, just pray a prayer of thanksgiving:

"Thank You for giving me hope for my past, hope in my present, and hope for my future."

Lord, I believe there are many across this room who have prayed that prayer with me. Lord, I thank You that today You have called people by name. We give You praise. In the name that is above all names, the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen and amen.

Now, everybody look right here. We do this every year at Easter.

If you prayed that prayer with me for the very first time, asking Jesus to be the Lord of your life, I'm going to ask you to take a bold stand here in just a moment.

If you heard Jesus calling your name and you called on His name to be saved, and you prayed that prayer, I'm going to ask you in just a moment to stand right where you are.

We do this every Easter. Last service, we just did it, and scores of people stood up all across the room.

If you're the only one standing, hey, that's all right. Jesus called your name, and so you're going to stand for Him.

Here's what we're going to do. On the count of three, it's just that simple. One, two, three. I'm going to ask you to stand all over this room if you prayed that prayer with me and meant it in your heart.

God bless you. One standing right here.

One, two, three. Stand up all over the room. "I'm praying it for the very first time." In the balcony, stand up right where you are.

Beautiful. Keep standing all over the room. Anybody else want to join them? "I'm praying, Jesus, asking You to be the Lord of my life."

We rejoice.

Now, church, stand with them. Church, stand with them. Church, stand with them.

You standing with them means a couple of things. Number one, we celebrate what God does in this place. That's why you heard those cheers, because the Bible says all of heaven throws a party when one person comes to know Jesus. We had scores and scores and scores, and we're so grateful for those who prayed to receive Christ.

Our church standing with you means that no one stands alone here at Champion Forest. There is a place for you. We love you.

If you prayed that prayer with me, the very best thing we can do is ask you to take that little registration guide that you received, that pamphlet right there. When you leave today, there are balloon towers at all of the exits. If you prayed that prayer with me for the very first time, asking Jesus to be the Lord of your life, go to one of those balloon towers. You'll hand that registration card in, and we're going to give you a brand-new Bible.

It's our gift to you, no strings attached, because we believe that if you trusted in Christ, the very best thing you can do is start giving your life to His Word. It's our gift to you.

Don't you want to say congratulations and way to go to all of those who called on the name of the Lord?

Make sure before we exit that you go to those balloon towers on the way out if you prayed to receive Christ for the first time.

Now, we're standing. We're going to sing a great anthem of Easter to close our time out: "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today."