

Words of Hope

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[0 : 0 0] This is from John chapter 19 and starting at verse 28. Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that the scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty.

A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it and put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, It is finished.

With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Now it was the day of preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.

The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true.

[1 : 2 1] He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled.

Not one of his bones will be broken. And as another scripture says, they will look on the one they have pierced. So this morning we're thinking about the passage Anna Lorne read from earlier, the Gospel of John chapter 19.

John was there when Jesus was crucified, and we have his eyewitness record of the events, the circumstances, and of how Jesus dealt with his crucifixion and what he said.

And there are a number of things that Jesus said when he was being crucified that have been recorded for us by these eyewitnesses that have come down to us through the centuries.

And they help us to understand the uniqueness of Jesus and the way that he dealt with such overwhelming suffering and darkness. So in the darkness, in the pain and suffering that he endures on crucifixion, Jesus speaks very powerfully these words.

[2 : 4 0] It is finished. And those are words of amazing hope. You know, sometimes we might say something's finished, and we mean it's kind of, it's wrecked, it's useless.

You know, I've got an old rusty car sitting outside. It's not worth fixing. It's finished. That's not what we mean here. This is not Jesus dying in defeat, but rather this is Jesus saying, it's finished, it's complete.

I've done everything that I had to do. Everything is accomplished. I've triumphed over darkness, sin, and death itself.

It is finished. And so these words that Jesus spoke from the cross, it is finished. It's a word of hope, great hope for us personally and for the world that we live in.

It's important to remember that when we speak about this as Christians, those of us who are Christians, we're not speaking about Jesus as some kind of distant but particularly interesting historical figure.

[3 : 52] However, when Christians speak about Jesus, we're speaking about our friend, our brother, our Lord, someone we love, someone that we believe to be with us in life.

And here Jesus, our friend, is speaking to us and saying, I'm holding out hope to you today. And the hope that I hold out to you is unbreakable because it doesn't rest on what you do, but it rests on what I've done for you.

My death is that great, irreversible, unshakable event on which you can build your life, your future, and your purpose in this world.

This is the God who at the cross brings good from evil. He has finished his work and he comes to say that he has completed God's great purposes of salvation and redemption.

So there's hope for our lives. There's hope for us personally. There's hope for the world. And so our Thursday thought is this. What am I saved from?

[5 : 13] But also, what am I saved for? Often as Christians, we think, or those of us who are Christians, think about what God has forgiven us for and what we're saved from. But we also want to think, well, why has he saved us?

What's our purpose? What are we saved for? What are we saved to do? So what am I saved from? But what am I saved for? So two thoughts I'm going to give to you.

One is thinking, first of all, about how Jesus has completed his work in this world. And then a second one will be about how we then move forward from where we are today to complete our work in this world, to fulfill God's purposes in our life.

So Jesus completes his work. When Jesus says it is finished, it's one word in Greek, *telelestai*.

And it's the Greek word *telos*, purpose, end, goal. And he's telling us this, that he's completed the work of salvation and that salvation is 100% him and 0% you.

[6 : 26] He's finished it. That means you don't have to do anything. Salvation, your salvation, a right relationship with God, forgiveness, removal of shame, whatever you seek, inward peace, satisfaction in life.

That doesn't depend on your striving or your effort. It depends on his striving on the cross, his effort in the face of death and suffering, his carrying the weight of all our sin on his shoulders.

Now, for many people, religion doesn't seem like a lot of fun. It seems like hard work, you know, rule keeping, going to church, being a good person, never having any fun ever.

And you think, that's not a life that appeals to me. And so there's this very shallow view sometimes or not full view of what religion is, that it's something that we do to make God pleased with us.

And Christianity is so different from that. It's not about what we do to make God pleased with us, but it's about what God has done in Jesus to show that he is pleased with us, to show that he loves us.

[7 : 49] He loves us simply because he loves us, not for what we do, but because he is a God of love. So Christianity is not about being a good person.

It's far more about what God does here through Jesus to rescue us, to rescue bad people. We're not here to say we're good. We're here to say we're red.

We're bad. We're sinful. We're struggling. I'm a sinner. You're a sinner. Everyone's a sinner. One of the things that the Bible shows to us as it begins to read into our lives and reveal the contents of our heart is this, that we are more wicked than we ever realized.

Now, you probably don't like to think of yourself in that way at all. I'm not wicked. I'm not evil. You know, I'm a decent person. Sin is somebody else's problem.

I heard a story this week about two brothers in Glasgow, a pair of Bampots, absolute mental cases, and always up to no good.

[8 : 54] They were aggressive, violent. They stole. They dealt drugs. They were always in trouble. They were notorious in their neighborhood, feared by everyone.

Real pair of thugs. And one day, one of the brothers suddenly dies. And the second brother is arranging his funeral.

And he meets with the minister. And he says to the minister, I'm going to pay you a lot of money to do this funeral, but you're going to have to say what I tell you to say.

And I want you to tell everyone that my brother was a saint. Saint. That's the word you've got to use. Saint. So the minister says, well, okay.

That's what I'll do then. So they come to the funeral service. And the minister stands up and he says, here's Billy lying in front of you. You all know he was a total Bampot.

[9 : 53] He was a thug. You were all scared of him. He was a terrible human being. He was a scum of the earth. But compared with his brother, he was a saint. And that's just a story that reminds us that sometimes, you know, when we compare ourselves with other people, we can feel good about ourselves.

But that's not the standard that God's holding us to. God holds us to a higher standard. He says, look at me and see how far short you fall of me and my standards and what I ask of you.

Yes, you're better than lots of other people, perhaps. But that's not the issue. The issue is where you are in relation to me.

There's a line that Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a Russian writer who lived through the Soviet era and was sent to the Gulag, and he wrote this really helpful phrase, which I think is so pertinent today, as always.

The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart and through all human hearts.

[11 : 16] So there is wrong, there is sin, there is evil, there is hatred, there is lies, there is brokenness, there is lust, there is greed, there is falsehood, there's selfishness in every single one of us.

Sin is not just out there, it's in here. Now when we come to terms with that, when we feel the weight of that, then what we want to do is fix it.

That's natural, isn't it? So how can Neil Macmillan, if this is true, how can Neil Macmillan, the sinner with evil running right through his heart, how can he get God to love him?

That's the question. How can I get God to love me? What do I have to do to make God accept me or listen to me? How can I get God to give me a second chance? How can I get God's attention?

Has he just written me off completely? How do I convince God that I'm sincere and well-meaning? What do I have to do? Now the problem with these answers is that these are self-righteous answers.

[12 : 27] They're about making myself better, making me more good, more righteous. Righteous just means goodness. And the problem is that if I work hard on that dimension of my life in order to convince God to love me, I'll actually move further away from God.

The more convinced I am of my own goodness, the less I'll think that I need God and his goodness. The more convinced I am of my self-righteousness, the less I'll think that I need the righteousness of Jesus shown in his obedience unto death on the cross.

For he lives a life of perfect obedience on my behalf. He is righteous for me because I can never live that righteous life myself. He dies for me because my sin is real and weighty and separates me from God.

So the more we work on our self-righteousness, the less room we'll have for God. If you think you're a pretty good person this morning, I bet you you've got very little space for God in your life.

If you think it's all about how hard you've got to try to prove that you're good and you're worthy and that you're deserving, then you won't really think that you need God.

[13 : 52] If you depend on yourself to show that you're in control, that you can survive, that you can manage, that you can succeed. If it's all about how hard you have to do everything to prove yourself and to prove your worth, then you won't have much space for Jesus.

Is that why there's no room for Jesus in your life? Because you're so consumed by what you have to do. If we think that we can fix the problem of sin by what we do, that shows a very superficial view of sin.

And a superficial view of sin will lead to a superficial relationship with God. Sin is evil. It's wicked. It's rebellion against God.

It leads to death. That's a problem you can't fix by being nicer or trying harder or being gooder or being better or succeeding or proving yourself or being more righteous.

All your self-righteousness is death to you. And so we don't just repent of sin when we come to Christ. We repent of our self-righteousness.

[15 : 03] We say, even my most righteous acts, O God, are like filthy rags before you. That's from the prophet Isaiah. So this is not about what you do for God, but what God has done for you through Jesus.

When Jesus, our friend, cries out on the cross, it is finished, he's saying to us, it's finished. I've done it for you. Rest in what I've done for you.

Stop your striving. Lay aside your fear, your anxiety, your self-loathing, whatever it is.

Set it aside because I love you. I love you enough to do absolutely everything that you need to be at rest as a human being in what I've done for you on the cross.

So that's him completing his work. Salvation is 100% Jesus. So we repent of our self-righteousness and we trust in the righteousness of Jesus.

[16 : 05] His death is enough. That's the rock we stand on, sure and stable. If you simply ask him, he will save you and never leave you.

He'll always be there for you. And remember this, this is a historical moment and event that cannot be reversed. That's what makes it so secure.

This is the moment of victory. When God overwhelms, overpowers and subdues forever the power of death and darkness and sin.

It is finished. It's done. The whole course of human history is altered. The whole flow and trajectory of this world is put on a new footing that will never be reversed.

Everything is paid for. Jesus paid it all. That's a song we'll sing at the end. And so we don't have to pay anything. Salvation is complete. You don't need to contribute anything.

[17 : 10] You just need to sit back and receive. So please do that. Please get hold of this great idea. You don't have to do anything.

You don't have to prove anything. You can rest. You can relax. You can receive all that you need from the work of Jesus.

So he's completed his work. And now we're going to complete our work. Okay, so let's move on. So we know that we have to complete our work too.

Do we know what we're saved for? We are not saved by good works. We're not saved by what we do. But we are saved for good works.

So in Ephesians chapter 2, the Apostle Paul puts it this way. It is by grace you've been saved. Through faith, this is not from yourselves. It's a gift of God. Not by works, so that no one can boast.

[18 : 15] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. So God doesn't save you because of your good works.

He saves you because of the work of Jesus. But he saves you to do good works. He gives you a new purpose when you're saved. There are good things that God has prepared in advance for you to do.

That's Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 to 10. Because God loves you, he gives your life purpose, direction, meaning.

Jeremiah chapter 29 puts it this way. I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future.

Plans to give you hope and a future. That's what God wants for you. To give you a new future, a future full of purpose in which you will do good. Good works.

[19 : 16] That's what you're saved for. To do good in this world. To be a blessing. To love your neighbor. To make disciples. To deal with injustice.

The apostle James writes later in the New Testament, What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, man. Be warm and full without giving them the things they need.

What good is that? So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. So saving faith, faith in Jesus Christ, is always identified with loving works.

We're thinking about Jesus so much recently and how he is on the cross. The love he shows to the people who are crucifying him. Father, forgive them, he prays.

[20 : 22] His love for the thief dying beside him. Today you'll be with me in paradise. His love for his mother. Here's your son, mum. The emotion that we read about most in Jesus and his life on this earth is compassion.

He was a deeply compassionate human being. And so if we have faith in Jesus, if our life is found in Jesus, we will become deeply compassionate people.

Sensitive to others and to their needs. So what is our new purpose? What are the works we are to complete before we've run our course and finished our race?

Well, I mentioned it already. We're here to be a blessing. God has a redemptive heart to rescue and restore this world, to rescue and restore sinners.

And so we must share God's heart of redemption to go into the brokenness and darkness of this world, to bring about good. To see people restored to relationship with God, to see people restored in their relationships with each other, to see people working to restore this world to justice and goodness.

[21 : 40] So you've got a good purpose. I want to say that you should see good things ahead. The future is different because of the cross of Jesus. It is finished.

God's work to change and rescue and restore this world is accomplished. Now we're seeing it worked out and applied. He has good things to do in the world.

And so as we look ahead, we can see there are good things ahead for us. God wants us to be doing good. As we come through this pandemic, we may be very caught up in the things that are hard for us.

And there are really hard things. But in the midst of that, we want to ask, what do I see that's good that God would have me do?

And sometimes we, you know, we shut our eyes to that. Sometimes we're willfully blind to what God wants us to do. Because we want to focus on what we want to do, what I want to do.

[22 : 44] Sometimes we blind ourselves to who we are, God's dear children. And we blind ourselves to why we're here, to bless, love and make disciples.

So let's see that there are good things ahead, even in a pandemic. Because God is on the throne and Christ has died and risen. There are good things ahead. And so lift up your head and see from where you're standing, what are the possibilities?

As you look around from your particular position in life, what are the good things that you can be doing to love your neighbor, to make disciples, to bless your community, to bless your colleagues or your workplace?

So look ahead and see good things to do. We are saved to be a blessing, to love neighbor, to make disciples.

Let's recommit to loving people. Let's recommit ourselves to this great purpose of God, to love, to bless, to make disciples. I was listening to a talk yesterday at the Thrive Conference by a guy called Ken Yanka in Dallas, from an organization called Global Advance.

[23 : 58] And he was just reminding us about God's good purposes for our lives and saying, raise your expectations as a human being, raise your expectations of what God will do. Raise your expectations to the level of scripture.

God has given you many great promises. So raise your expectations to the level of scripture. And let's seek the good of the city that we live in.

Let's not be so wrapped up in ourselves that we forget to bless the city. And we read from Jeremiah about the plans God has to bless us and to give us purpose in life.

And in Jeremiah chapter 29, we're told this, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I've carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers you too, we'll prosper.

So we live in the city of Edinburgh. And in some ways as Christians, we're in exile. This is not our true home, is it? We're looking forward to the new creation. This world clashes with our way of seeing and being and valuing and loving.

[25 : 05] But we seek the good of the city. So whoever you are, please pray and seek the prosperity of Edinburgh. Densely populated places that cities are, they're busier, they're more productive.

There's an intensity of need and opportunity in the city. So do whatever you can, whether you work in business or education, in the finance sector, the health sector, the public sector, whether you're in local government or arts and media or work in a church.

We all want to use what we are doing and work together to bless the city, love the city, serve the city. That's costly, it's sacrificial, but we're saved to be a blessing.

So live with purpose. Live with great purpose. Do good in every area of life, in home and family and community.

Show the redemptive heart of God. And live with hope that God will bless in great ways. He's building his kingdom. He's redeeming broken people.

[26 : 15] You know, pandemics. Can God do good in the pandemic? We know he can. Joseph had a terrible life to read about in the book of Genesis. His brother sold him into human slavery.

He was in prison unjustly, falsely accused of assault. And he said this, he says, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

He redeems broken bad things and turns them to good. Joseph ends up second in command of Egypt, feeding the world through famine, through a time of famine.

So as we move ahead into difficulty, as we face hard days, let's move forward with the purpose of God to bless, to love, to make disciples.

And as we move forward, we know that because of the cross, because it's finished, that God will be everything that you need him to be. God will be everything that you need him to be.

[27 : 17] He will not let you down. We live with hope every day because we know that because of the cross, our best days are still ahead of us.

We are moving from one glory to another. And we have hope in this life and even in the life to come because Jesus said, it is finished.

He's completed his work. Let's keep moving forward to complete the work that God has given us to do and he will be with us. He'll be everything you need him to be.

Amen. Very short prayer. Fergus will take us to a song called Jesus Paid It All. So Lord Jesus, please help us to see how great what you've done for us is and help us to see that you've got great things for us to do in your name.

Lord, we don't think we're great. We don't think that the things that we will do are great because we do them, but because you're working out your wonderful purposes.

[28 : 25] You're a good God. Thank you that you love us, that you rescue us and that you include us in doing good in this world. Amen.