



Sermon Thoughts for Easter Sunday

Sermon Thoughts on 1 Corinthians 15:19-20

“Certain Hope for Uncertain Times”

Preaching on Easter

After inviting as many people as possible to worship on Easter, you are imagining standing up to preach the Word of God to a mixed group. Some are your long-term members. Others may be hearing the gospel for the first time. The goal is to preach a sermon that connects with real concerns (shared even by someone who is not a Christian), goes deeper than most people have thought, and then finds the answer in God's grace and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Main Point

If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, we wouldn't have any certainty or hope, no matter what the circumstance. But because he has, we have hope even when our lives are uncertain because of COVID-19, job loss, etc.

The Context

The main issue in Corinth was a disconnect between public preaching that Christ was raised and a denial of a resurrection for others. Paul argues that you can't have it both ways. Either there is a resurrection or there isn't. If there isn't, then Christianity is worthless. If there is (and Easter proves it), then there is a resurrection also for believers.

- vv. 1-11: The fact that Christ was raised on the third day is central to the gospel preached not only by Paul but by all the apostles, based on the eyewitness testimony of Peter, the Twelve, 500 others, and Paul.
- vv. 12-19: Is a string of six conditional statements, tracing out what is logically inevitable if the premise were true that there is no resurrection.
- vv. 20-23: Christ has been raised as the firstfruits.
- vv. 24-28: What will happen when he returns at the end.
- vv. 29-34: If there is no resurrection, what point is there in living and dying and facing death for Christ? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Turn away from such sinful thinking!

- vv. 35-57: Another question: what kind of body will we have? Illustrations about different types of flesh and different types of seeds. So is the contrast between the natural body and the spiritual body. The ultimate answer is in the victory of Christ over sin and death.
- v. 58: Conclusion: In view of the resurrection, stand firm, and give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

Sermon Overview

There can be no doubt that people today are feeling uncertain. There seem to be even fewer things we can depend on than usual. In the middle of such uncertainty, people have a variety of hopes—things they wish would happen. There is no guarantee, however, that their wishes will come true.

Easter gives people something better. It gives sure and certain hope to the things God has promised. Both his promises about this life and the next are dependent on Jesus' resurrection from the dead. This is why the truth of Easter is so important. It assures us that he can and will keep his promises. We don't need to wish. We can know.

How to Use These Sermon Thoughts

The thoughts below are intended to provide a flow of ideas for a pastor's Easter message. It is not intended, necessarily, to be a complete sermon. (Although, if in a certain setting a shorter than usual message is appropriate, these thoughts could serve as such.) The preacher should feel free to elaborate on certain points or add illustrations and applications as he sees fit for his listeners.

Certain Hope for Uncertain Times

Intro: Uncertainty is the worst

Uncertainty is the worst. It causes a lot of stress. There is the inability to make plans. Then constantly changing those plans. There is the mental burden, the mind spinning, the trying to find the solution that will bring clarity.

Uncertainty is the worst. And these are certainly uncertain times. Over the past year, things kept changing. The things I thought were certain weren't. Things I was told were true weren't. Nothing seemed certain. It still doesn't.

In such uncertain times, people need hope. They need to believe there are answers—solutions to what they are experiencing. What are some things people are hoping for as we sit here this Easter Sunday morning?

“I hope this virus goes away so life can get back to normal.”

“I hope I get a job soon.”

“I hope our country can heal.”

It is important to have hope. The problem is that most of the time the hope people have is really no hope at all. It is nothing more than a wish, a dream, a “Wouldn’t it be great if...?” There is nothing certain about such hope. And so, this kind of hope isn’t much help.

That’s why it is so good we are here this morning. We are here to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And we are going to discover that what happened outside of Jerusalem that first Easter Sunday nearly two thousand years ago gives us a different kind of hope—a sure and certain hope.

Part I: Easter gives us hope for uncertainty in this life

The Bible is filled with promises—promises of what Jesus is doing and will do in the lives of his people. It promises, for example:

- That Jesus is always with us. No matter where we are, we are never alone.
- That Jesus knows our every fear and worry.
- That Jesus has the power to protect us.
- That Jesus has the power to provide for us.
- That Jesus hears our prayers.
- That Jesus loves us.

If Jesus’ bones are buried in a cave somewhere outside of Jerusalem, NONE of these promises can be true. And God’s promises cannot be trusted.

But Jesus’ bones are not buried. His bones, along with the rest of his body, were raised back to life. And he is alive and well this very day.

So, he is able to fulfill every promise the Bible makes about him.

- Jesus IS always with you. No matter where you are, you are never alone.
- Jesus knows your every fear and worry—whether it is about a virus or a job or the future of your country.
- Jesus has the power to protect you and provide for you. You need never worry.
- Jesus hears your prayers. Every, single, one.
- Jesus loves you—loves YOU. He loves you more than you could ever imagine. He loves you enough to win forgiveness for your every sin.

You don’t need to *hope* he is with you, can protect you, loves you, and forgives you. These are God’s *promises*. This is a sure and certain hope because Jesus is alive and is perfectly capable of carrying out his promises.

Part II: Easter gives us hope for a certain life to come

But there will come a day when even that won’t be enough. There will come a day, for every one of us, when promises about this life won’t matter because this life will end. What then?

In our Bible reading for today, the apostle Paul put it this way: “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (v. 19). Yes, we have hope in this life

because Jesus is alive. But, if that were the only hope we had, it wouldn't matter when we leave this life.

Paul writes, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (v. 20).

Well, there it is—the greatest promise you could possibly hear this morning. If you sat down this morning and were promised that COVID-19 would disappear by the end of the week, that would be great. If you were promised that you would wake up tomorrow and be given your dream job, that would be great. If you were promised a winning lottery ticket that gave you a guaranteed income for the rest of your life, that would be great. But none of these promises can compare to what the apostle Paul just said.

Listen again, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." In other words, Jesus *did* rise from the dead *and* he is just the first one who will do so. Because he won forgiveness of sins and conquered death, everyone who follows him will also be raised from the dead one day.

Talk about hope! It essentially means that this life cannot really hurt you. It can cause you pain and disappointment and frustration, sure. Yet knowing that this life is only temporary but the next life will be eternal puts things in perspective. Doesn't it? And knowing that this life may have pain but that the next life will be painless is priceless. And knowing that this life may be filled with tears but that the next life will be tear-free dries those tears a bit. Doesn't it?

"Sounds too good to be true, Pastor." I agree. It does. Eternal life? In a perfect paradise? And given to me as a free gift earned by Jesus? Is this just pie in the sky thinking?

No. No, it is not. Unlike the kind of hope this world offers, Easter offers sure and certain hope. Because Jesus *did* rise from the dead. Because he *is* alive and well able to keep his promises. Because he promises eternal life to all of his people.

Conclusion

Uncertainty is the worst. Whether it is uncertainty about your health or your wealth, or a virus or a vaccine, or your job or your relationships, uncertainty stinks.

In this remarkably uncertain time, aren't you glad you don't need to rely on wishes and dreams? You can rely on the sure and certain promises of God. You can rely on a Savior who is alive and well. He is your hope here...and hereafter.