

Adam Smith: Living Hope

He is risen one more time. This is an ancient tradition that has lasted the test of time for centuries. When God's people gathered together for worship on Easter morning and someone rejoices, someone proclaims he is risen, everyone responds.

So let's join in with saints past, present, and future in this declaration of our hope that Jesus Christ is risen. Hallelujah. All right.

That is what we celebrate today. We celebrate the resurrection of King Jesus from the dead and the living hope that we have through him. And that's what our world needs right now more than ever.

That is what some of you need right now more than ever. You came in and you don't know what to expect today and that's fine. But you know that all of your attempts to find hope out there is shaky.

What we need today as a people, what we need today as a church, what we need today as individuals when we look around the world and we struggle to know what is out there that will last. What can I build my life upon? What is sturdy enough to place my hope in? You know, you know, and it's all like shadows. And so today we come in more than ever in need of hope.

But we need to understand what that word means because sometimes we hear the word hope and we think making a wish. Like hopefully everything will work out all right. Like blowing out the candles on a birthday cake or chucking some change into a fountain.

But that's not what the Bible means when the Bible uses the word hope. Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. Biblical hope is the confident assurance that what you are building your life upon and the future you are trusting in is certain.

And so that raises the question for us this morning. Is there anything today actually strong enough, stable enough, trust worthy enough to build our hope upon? Because here is the reality as we already mentioned. We live in a shaken world.

We live in a shaking world. What used to feel sturdy doesn't anymore. Every four years at least both panic and hope arise and half of the country is celebrating and half of the country is in despair.

You feel these fluctuations, the economic fluctuations every time you fill up at the gas station or tap your card at the grocery store. Wars and rumors of wars make us feel like the world is always just one headline away from something even more tragic. But it's not just the world out there.

It's the world in here and in here. It's our relationships. Maybe you feel it in your marriages.

What began as joy is now filled with frustration and fighting or worse yet filled with silence. And you're quietly asking, maybe audibly asking, are we going to make it? Is this going to work? Some of you feel it in your hearts and your minds, the thoughts that don't turn off, the anxiety that's cranked up to 11. Maybe you're here and you are deeper into an addiction that you ever thought was possible.

And even if life looks good on the outside, there's this quiet fear underneath it all. How long can I keep it all up? How long can I keep up appearances? And if this all comes crumbling down, am I going to be okay? If all hell breaks loose, how do I know that I will be safe? And here's the truth. This is not, we're not the first generation to feel this.

We're not the first people to experience seasons like this. It's part of the human condition. And the Bible is the authority on the human condition.

And so as Aaron said, we're going to be reading from Isaiah chapter six today. So if you have not turned there, please do so now. I'm going to read Isaiah six, verses one through seven.

It says in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. And the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim.

Each had six wings. With two, he covered his face. And with two, he covered his feet.

And with two, he flew. And one called to another and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke. And I said, woe is me, for I am lost.

For I am a man of unclean lips. And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

And one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.

Let's pray together one more time. Heavenly Father, just as you revealed yourself to Isaiah in this text, would you reveal yourself to us now? God, would you stir up what needs to be stirred up? Would you shake in our lives the things that need to be shaken up, Lord? Would you expose what needs to be exposed? And would you show us your glory? Would you reveal Christ to us, the risen King? It's in his name that we pray. Amen.

Well, Isaiah says that this vision occurred in the year that King Uzziah died. Now that's not a timestamp, okay? That's not just a reference to a particular date. It is the reference to a national crisis.

You see, King Uzziah wasn't just any king. King Uzziah was a good king. And in a nation where

good kings were hard to come by, Uzziah was a breath of fresh air.

Uzziah did what was right. Uzziah was good. And Uzziah reigned for over 50 years.

Think about that. Most people in Israel at that time only knew one king. And under that king, there was strength.

Under that king, there was prosperity. Under that king, there was national security. Things were good.

But then Uzziah got sick. He spent his last few years reigning from isolation. And then Uzziah died.

And everything that felt secure suddenly wasn't. And here's the point. If your hope is built on something that can change, then your world will tremble every time it does.

And it's in that moment that Uzziah has this experience of his hope being pulled out from underneath him. It's in the year that everything collapsed that Uzziah says, I saw the Lord. Within his unstable world, Uzziah experiences the only thing in all the universe that is certain.

It's not a new king. It's not a backup plan. Uzziah sees God himself on the throne, high and lifted up, exalted and unthreatened.

Because when things in our world are uncertain, heaven doesn't tremble. God does not look down on our world in worry. He is completely confident.

The king is on the throne. He always has been. He always will be.

He is holy, holy, holy. But in this moment, this vision exposes a deeper problem for Uzziah because the text doesn't stop there. When he sees the Lord, he doesn't go, Oh my goodness.

Thank you, Lord. We're saved. We're going to be okay.

Because you are on the throne. No, he doesn't feel comfort. He feels terror.

He says, woe is me. I am lost. I'm undone.

Literally, I am destroyed because I am a man of unclean lips. And so check out what just happened, right? Isaiah thought the biggest problem in his world was the death of King Uzziah. He thought the biggest problem in his life was the world out there.

But when he sees the true king, when he should have been reassured, he realizes instead, I don't belong here. I shouldn't be here. I can't live in your presence.

Rather than God's presence creating security for Isaiah, it revealed in him this deep insecurity because standing before a holy God, Isaiah sees his sin. And the crazy thing is Isaiah wasn't a bad dude. By all visible measures, Isaiah was a good guy.

Someone that we might look at and say, that guy can be confident in the presence of the Lord. But in the presence of something so pure and so holy, what once felt okay now stood in stark contrast of the one who is holy, holy, holy. Have you ever tried to watch a movie from your childhood with your kids or grandkids and then suddenly remember a scene that you had forgotten like after it was too late? And what used to never make you even blush now feels inappropriate in the presence of someone's innocence.

Someone whose mind has not been shaped by that theme or those jokes or those scenes yet. It's kind of like what's happening to Isaiah. He steps into the presence of God, not just a more moral being, but absolute holiness.

And in that moment, he doesn't compare himself to other people. He sees himself in light of God and everything that he once assumed was okay about himself falls apart. And this is where Isaiah confronts something in us that we often don't like to admit.

Because many of us say that we want God. We want God in our lives. We want his presence.

We want his peace. We want his help. We want his promises.

But we don't want to take our sin seriously. We want God, but just not a God who's this holy. And so often what we do is we soften him.

We reduce his holiness. We redefine his justice. We reinterpret his word.

We create a version of God who's more comfortable, more manageable, more like us. A God who affirms us and never confronts us. A God who comforts us, but never calls us to repentance.

A God who stays close enough to help in times of need, but far enough away that we don't have to feel the heat of his holiness. But Isaiah never gets that option. Finds himself just ground zero, thrown into the unfiltered presence of God's holiness.

And he doesn't get to reshape God into something safer. He sees God as he truly is. And here's what we learn.

The reason the world felt so unstable for Isaiah was not just because the king was dead. It wasn't just because of his circumstances. The reason Isaiah felt unstable in his identity, in his future, in that moment was because of his own sin.

And that's true for us as well. Because sin separates us from God. Sin separates us from the only one who doesn't tremble when circumstances get difficult.

Sin separates us from our creator, from our maker, from the one who knows the way life works best. Sin separates us from God. And so we're left to try to build our lives and build our identities and build our hope and build our future on lesser things.

On things that don't last. On things that are just shadows. They're like phantoms.

They're here one moment, but in the blink of an eye can be taken away. But then in that moment, something unexpected happens. It says that one of these seraphim, these angels with six wings, literally seraphim means burning ones.

These creatures come and they take a coal from the altar where the sacrifices are made before the presence of the Lord to atone for sin. And one of the seraphim takes one of those coals and brings it to Isaiah and touches his lips with it. And the very place of Isaiah's sin becomes the place of God's cleansing.

The holy fire of God's presence doesn't consume Isaiah as he anticipated, but it cleanses Isaiah. It heals Isaiah. It purifies Isaiah.

And the angel says, your guilt is taken away. Your sin is atoned for. And in that moment, everything feels resolved in the story.

His guilt is gone. His sin is covered, but it's only for a moment because Isaiah walks out of the temple and he returns to a world that's still broken and in a body that is still broken. And Isaiah eventually dies and that fire that was real wasn't final.

That fire that began a work could not complete the work. God's people still waited for something greater. And then 700 years after Isaiah, that something greater came.

Not just another vision of a holy God, but the presence of a saving king. See, when God's people once again experienced radical instability under tyrannical Roman rule, Jesus arrived on the scene and his disciples trusted in him. They believed that he was the king.

They believed that he was the promised savior. They believed that he was going to fix everything, that he was going to march on Rome and overthrow Caesar and establish political freedom. They believed that he was going to restore their national prosperity.

They even believed that following him would create opportunities for their own personal glory. They believed that Jesus was the way into the future that they had always hoped for. And then Jesus is arrested on a Thursday evening.

And then Jesus is crucified on Friday. And then Jesus dies. And in that moment, everything that they had hoped for collapses again, right in front of their eyes.

They were utterly undone. Imagine the shock. I mean, how is this even possible? The one who cleansed lepers with a touch of his hand, the one who could drive out the powers of hell with a word, who literally looked at a raging storm and said, shh, and it went quiet.

How in the world can a Roman cross utterly undo every single shred of hope that they had in this man? Every hope, every expectation, every vision of their future gone in an instant. Just another Uzziah, just another dead king, another reminder that nothing lasts, another reminder

that we are all abandoned. Listen, if the story ended there, Christianity would be just another failed attempt at hope.

If the story had ended there, you would have never heard of this man. You would have never heard the name Jesus. But this man, this Jesus is the Lord.

And three days later on Easter morning, before the sun rose, while the world was still dark, a woman named Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. And when she got to the tomb, the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. The gospel of Luke tells us that Mary looks into the tomb and there's two angels standing there and they ask her, why are you looking for the living among the dead? This was not wishful thinking.

This was a living hope. And John chapter 20 says that confused and sorrowful Mary stood outside the tomb, weeping, not knowing what had taken place. And she sees Jesus, but she doesn't recognize Jesus.

Her eyes and her grief are clouding her vision, her tears. And then he says one word, Mary, her name. That's all.

And that was enough. In that moment, everything changes. Mary turns and she embraces Jesus.

And Jesus says to her, he says, go and tell my brothers, the disciples, go and tell my brothers that I'm ascending to my God and your God, to my father and your father. And Mary goes and she announces to the disciples, I have seen the Lord. Did you catch it? In the very weekend that King Jesus died, Mary saw the Lord.

Isaiah said that he saw the Lord and he crumbles. Mary says that she sees the Lord and rejoices. What's the difference? Isaiah saw a holy God and his sin was exposed.

Mary sees the same holy God risen from the dead, but now he bears scars in his hands and a wound in his side. What's the difference between Isaiah's experience and Mary's experience is the cross. See Isaiah had fire from the coal touch his lips, but Mary sees the one who took the fire of God's judgment that she deserved for her sin into his own body.

When Jesus went to the cross, he took our sin upon himself. He paid the penalty that our sin deserved so that we could stand before God and know that our debt is paid so that we could stand before a holy God and know that Christ has made a way so that we could stand before a holy God in confidence, not because of anything that we have done, but because of what he has done for us. And then Jesus raised from the dead, proving that his sacrifice for sin, the payment for sin, was accepted.

See the resurrection proves that death has been defeated, but not only that, it proves that everything that Jesus said was true. Because if he has the authority to raise himself from the dead, then he has the authority to tell us the way our lives should look. He has the authority to

tell us where salvation can be found.

So the resurrection from the dead proves that sin has been paid for and so our hope is no longer fragile. It no longer shakes with our circumstances. It means that there is now finally something in this world that does not collapse under the weight of our lives.

So that now you don't have to stand before God and like Isaiah say, I am undone, woe is me. You can stand before God like Mary and say, I am forgiven. And listen, here's why this matters for you today.

Because you are building your life on something. We all are. We are all building our lives on something.

Something that we expect is strong enough to be there for us tomorrow. The problem is that nothing in this world, nothing in our lives is guaranteed. Nothing that you've achieved for yourself or received from others is promised to be there in the morning.

Not your reputation or your identity, not your career or your wealth, not your beauty or your strength. None of those things are bad, but they're all fragile. Reputation, identity, gone in a moment.

Not even because of anything that you've done. Gossip and slander, someone can have it in their mind to ruin you and they can. Career and wealth, businesses fail, markets shift, currency is devalued.

Beauty and strength, brothers and sisters, time always wins. If your hope is built on something that can be taken from you, your anxiety will skyrocket every time it's threatened and your hope will collapse once it finally fails or your body gives out. But because Jesus is risen, through faith in him, you now can have a hope that can't be shaken.

A living hope that doesn't tremble. A hope that doesn't collapse. So that when everything else gives way, when the things that you've trusted in begin to slip and crack, when your life that you have been building doesn't hold together, you won't fall apart.

Because your hope will be built on the one who conquered death. The apostle Peter says it best, I think, in 1 Peter 1, starting in verse 3, he says, blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his mercy, he 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, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this, you rejoice. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This hope doesn't mean that life will all go swimmingly, just rainbows and butterflies. These words were penned by men who suffered, whose hope was in Jesus. And yet they experienced hardship and trials.

They experienced suffering and despair even of their own lives. They experienced all ounce of difficulty and yet their eyes were still fixed on a risen king. And so they did it with joy.

They did it with hope. Putting your faith in Jesus today doesn't mean that everything in life will go well. Chances are it will be hard, but you can endure because Jesus has conquered the worst thing that can ever happen.

Jesus heals where your life is broken. Jesus cleanses where you feel wretched. He touches illness and heals.

He proclaims truth and saves. He carries sin and shame into the grave and sets you free. And he raises from the dead, raising all who believe to new life in him.

The good news is you can have that hope today through faith in Jesus. And you don't have to clean yourself up. You don't have to fix yourself first.

You don't have to get your life together before you come to him. You can come like Isaiah, honest and undone. And when you come in faith, what was true for Isaiah is true for you.

Your guilt taken away, your sin atoned for, and you can leave like Mary rejoicing in living hope. And so friends, Jesus is alive. As he called Mary's name that day, he calls yours.

Listen, I don't know why you came today. I don't know what reasons you had. I don't know if this is your church where you worship every Sunday.

I don't know if this is your annual tradition to attend an Easter service. I don't know if you were like dragged here or threatened by friends and family. I have no idea what brought you into the seat that you're sitting in right now.

But I will tell you this. The fact that you are here is not an accident. I don't believe in a God of coincidences.

The fact that you are here is evidence that the risen King is calling your name. That the risen King who has conquered everything that you have to fear is standing there. And though you may not see him because of tears or grief or fears or whatever it may be, know that in this time as he calls your name, he is inviting you not into shame for your past, whether it's things that you have done or things that have been done to you.

He's not calling your attention to the wounds, to the grief, to the betrayal, to the abandonment, to the pain. He is calling your eyes to him. The one with wounds in his hands and the wound in his side.

The one who wore a crown of thorns on the cross. The one who bore your sin, your guilt, your shame. The one who was laid in the tomb, your guilt and shame along with him.

The one who raised from the dead, leaving your guilt and shame in the grave. It does not own you anymore. He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the risen one, our living hope.

He is alive. He is calling your name. Will you keep looking for hope? Will you keep looking for living hope among things that are dead and dying? Or will you today, this day, turn and embrace the one who lives? That is the choice before us all today.

Father, we place ourselves in your hands. Everything we are, everything we carry, everything we're holding on to, we entrust it, Lord, to you. Would you move among us now in power, stir those places in our hearts that have grown cold? God, where we've fallen asleep, would you wake us up, Lord, where we've allowed faith to lie dormant? God, would you bring revival? Would you bring awakening by your Holy Spirit? Lord, where there is sin, give us courage to face conviction and heal us.

Bring life where there's death. Jesus, do what only you can do. We trust you.

Lord, it's our delight to follow you, to live for you. And we pray that if there's anyone here who walked into this place not yet knowing you as their Savior, you as their King, you as their living hope, God, we pray that we all would surrender ourselves to you now. It's in the name of the risen King Jesus that we pray.

Amen.