

Romans 10:9  
Resurrection Hope  
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“A black beetle sat on the edge of the canoe.” This is how Cecil B. DeMille, the great Hollywood film director, recalled a memory, from what could have been a childhood afternoon. “I was up on a lake in the Maine woods, drifting in my canoe, reading and looking up in the sky. When a black beetle wandered up onto the gunwale of the canoe, stuck its talons into the woodwork, and died. The sun was hot. In about three hours I looked at my water beetle again. He was parched. His back was cracking open. I watched and out of the back of that dead beetle I saw something emerge. A most beautiful dragonfly, iridescent with greens and blues. As I sat watching, it flew farther in a second than the water beetle had crawled in days. I turned back to the gunwale and there was the shriveled water beetle husk, like a black tomb. Then the thought occurred to me: ‘If God does that for a water beetle, I wonder what he will do for the likes of me?’”

This story sounds like a childhood reflection from a summer day. But it was in fact written as a devotion near the end of his life. What he began to wonder as he watched the beautiful new creature emerge from a worn out, cracked, shriveled shell is: What’s next for me?

And the wonder of this little enacted parable filled his imagination with all sorts of good things, the best of which is the beautiful epiphany that the best, indeed, is yet to come.

Another dark tomb sits on the edge of Jerusalem. And our recollection of it is from another time, 2,000 years ago. But Easter this morning gives us the opportunity to consider its meaning differently. To look forward to the future differently in light of what it means. We can consider our own futures differently because of Easter.

Whatever you face this morning, Easter gives you the opportunity to take what we face back to an earlier time and place our lives alongside this empty tomb. And in so doing, we are also given the ability to live boldly for the future.

This morning, we’re coming to the end of a series through the book of Romans in which we’ve looked to Jesus Christ as the inspiration of our hope. Through him, we are given the opportunity to see that hope always has the final word in our life.

Our text is one short verse. So I would like to invite you now, as you are able, to stand with me and let’s read together Romans chapter 10 verse 9.

**If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

The tomb is empty. And the tomb this morning is empty for you. Easter is not just a nice story we tell this time of year alongside a bunny with eggs filled with candy (how much sense does that make?). It’s not just a story we retell with flannel graph or pictures to our children and those who are naïve enough to believe. No, the historical accounts of Jesus of Nazareth refer to the greatest reality

that has ever existed in all of creation. That God has literally broken the powers of death, and that resurrection power is available this morning for you.

When the women came to the tomb that first morning, only to find it vacant, the second movement reenacted this morning in Vyvian's baptism was complete. Not only had Jesus suffered brutally, carrying the sins of his people—you and me—on the cross and down to the grave. But now the tomb where he lay stood empty. **He is not here, he is risen**, the angels said, **just as he told YOU**.

Throughout the New Testament, when writers like Peter and Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, say “you”, they use the plural form, “y’all.” (Southerners get this one right). But here Paul is addressing you and me individually using the singular active “you”: “If you believe and confess.”

You know, when we gather in worship, we gather as a body of believers and inquirers, seated on pews (instead of theater seating), bathed in light through stained glass. And in this respect, our worship is corporate, it's y'all. It's not merely an individualized, custom tailored experience, determined by your browsing history, purchased from Amazon.

What makes this “you” even more powerful is realizing that when Paul wrote this letter, he understood that he's writing about an event that took place 30 years earlier. Not only that, he wrote to a community 1500 miles away in Rome. A lot of time has passed, almost as much as it took to get there, and yet the apostle Paul says, “If you...” You see the resurrection of Jesus Christ, dear friends, is for you this morning. **If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

But you might be tempted to think to yourself: *Well, maybe it's for her or for him, I mean look at them, they are so committed, they're so into this whole Jesus and church thing. I mean look at them, they're even singing with their eyes closed. That guy over there is taking notes in the Bible he brought with them. This is certainly for them. I just don't know if it's for me.*

*You see, what they don't know about me is that I've been struggling with self-hatred and depression for years. Or I've been in a loveless marriage. I've not spoken to my kids in months or even years. I've been battling an addiction to alcohol or pornography from which I just cannot break free; I'm consumed with grief; and frankly I've given up on faith.*

*Easter Sunday can't be for me.*

Before you make yourself judge, jury, executioner, let me just tell you, that's not your call. Paul says that you are not Lord, Jesus is Lord. He's the one who gets to make the decision about your value, spiritual life, your future, your worth, and your potential.

Among the many implications of the confession “Jesus is Lord” is that you are not. And the one who is Lord is the one who walked among the least and the last. He is the one who gave his life in love, and he hung out with all manner of people, people like you and me.

He is the one who breaks the power of canceled sin and sets the prisoner free. He is the one whom Paul says that if you believe in him, you will be saved.

When Jesus comes back from the dead, who does he find? To whom has he come?

He finds Peter, a deserter. Thomas, a doubter who says unless I see with my own eyes and touch the nail holes I will not believe. He comes back for Paul/Saul, a murderer who has been hunting and persecuting Christians. Why would you not think he would come for you, just as you are? The tomb is empty, it's empty for you.

Imagine yourself back in the boat with Cecil B. DeMille, and now look over the gunwale and down into the water. What do you see? If you look down through the murky water and the mud, you'll see thousands of little beetles. They're actually nymphs, Dragon Fly larvae. What his reflection says is that these little creatures cling to the mud and the hopelessness around them wondering if they have any future at all. And yet what they don't realize is that every single one of them is destined for life. They have a hope and a future, they just don't realize it yet because they're so caught up in their circumstance that they can't look up and see the other dragon flies soaring effortlessly, with beautiful, resplendent bodies.

This resurrection truth is for you. If the creator works such wonders with the lowliest of creatures, what must be in store for the human spirit? The tomb is empty this morning, that's why we're here. The tomb is empty because God made you truly to live, if you believe in your heart you will be saved.

Saved from what? Well, saved from a life in which all that is possible is all that is seen.

In so many ways, the time that has passed since last Easter has been remarkably challenging. So much worry and hostility, so much division and separation, so much violence, and so little view of the end. And if this is all there is, then yes, eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.

If this is true, then our Coptic brothers and sisters in Egypt will say this morning—why not take the morning off. But they are not doing this.

If this were the case, our brothers and sisters in Yazdia, Syria would say, perhaps it's better we don't. Is it really worth it?

You see, the world wants to confine us to our tombs. Tombs of fear, of hatred, of self-righteousness, of insecurity, of success, of accomplishment, of addiction. What Easter says to us this morning is that you weren't meant to live in these tombs. If you believe, you will be set free from your tomb. As a one pastor I know likes to put it, Jesus didn't spend much time in his tomb, he's not going to help you get comfortable in yours.

No matter what we face, there is more at work around us that can give us life and offers us hope. Easter gives us a new set of eyes to see our circumstances. Easter gives us an eternal perspective. Jesus is Lord, not your security, not your bank account, not your health, not your relationships. Jesus is Lord.

Unlike the larvae under the water, we don't live under our circumstances. The good news of Easter is that we live above our circumstances. You have resurrection life in your future. So what does this mean for you? What do you face this Easter Monday? What challenges you? What discourages you? What causes you to fear? In all of these things, there is an unaccountable resurrection hope in your future.

So, brothers and sisters, what is the final argument for the hope we have in Jesus Christ? None other than an empty tomb, with nothing more than a few grave cloths. Jesus is alive, and so is our hope. Alleluia. Amen.