

# “THE DAWN OF HOPE”

1 PETER 2:9-10

MARCH 23, 2008 – SUNDAY 9:30AM – DR. JACK GRAHAM

[applause] That is awesome! He is awesome; He is alive!

I want to speak to you today on “The Dawn of Hope... The Dawn of Hope” Easter is early this year. As a matter of fact you will not see early... Easter this early in your lifetime, nor will your children, potentially even your great grandchildren will never see Easter this early as this day right now. As a matter of fact 150 years looking the other way, in the past. Your parents and your grandparents never saw Easter this early.

In case you’re trying to figure all of this out, Easter has been celebrated since around the sixteenth century on the first Sunday following the first full moon following the first day of Spring. You got it? [laughter] Now don’t ever forget that. [laughter] The first Sunday following the first full moon following the first day of Spring. And so Easter is symbolized by Springtime. Beautiful flowers, beautiful colors, the breaking through of... of green from the dark brown, the death of winter.

But most of all Easter is celebrated by life, born again! A living hope. So that’s why I ask you to take your Bibles today and turn to 1 Peter chapter 2, and we’re going to be discovering the dawn of hope.

A number of years ago off the coast of Massachusetts a submarine went down and divers went in to see if there were survivors. One of the divers who went very deep and found the vessel heard a gentle tapping from within. He recognized it as Morse code... the dots and the dashes of the code. What was the message coming from within the vessel of death? “Is there any hope... is there any hope?” And this is the question that the world is asking today. Is there any hope? And it seems that the world is more troubled than ever before.

Apparently our nation is still deeply divided racially, culturally and otherwise. We know, of course, of the war on terrorism and the terrible battles that are being fought in the name of freedom around the world; that terrorists stalk the planet... stalk the planet. This is a time in which pandemic diseases are raging around the earth; diseases that seemingly are impossible to heal. Starvation is everywhere. The American dollar is down, down, down. And the economy is struggling. And people are concerned about their future... their financial future. People are asking questions regarding the environment and the future of planet earth. Lawlessness is moving everywhere, and immorality is increasing, and it seems in the war for right and wrong that wrong is winning!

And on a personal level people are facing stress and anxiety and a sense of defeat and even despair like we’ve never known. Politicians promise hope; preachers will be talking about hope today. The desire... the longing that things will get better; the hope and the promise of a brighter future.

But is that the hope that we read about in the Bible? Just the promise of something better, the promise of something brighter; that hopefully... wishfully we will find something else... something more?

Now I believe in positive thinking, I believe in optimism. I heard about an 87 year old lady who went out on a blind date with a 93 year old man. She was blindly optimistic. When she got back home her daughter asked her

how did it go. She said, “It was terrible!” [She] Said, “I had to slap him 3 times!” “You had to slap him 3 times? Why is that? Did he try to get fresh?” She said, “No. I thought he was dead!” [laughter] Now that’s blind optimism.

But we have something so much better than blind optimism. We have a living hope in Christ. And so in 1 Peter chapter 2, beginning at verse 9:

9) *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession. (We sang it just a moment ago “I am His and He is mine.”) that you may proclaim the excellences of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light. 10) Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

And how have we received mercy? Look back in chapter 1 of 1 Peter and verse 3. Peter delivers a doxology... a song of praise, Easter praise. At verse 3:

3) Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His great mercy He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4) to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever take us from His hand! In Christ [tap] alone [tap] we [tap] stand! On the solid rock of Christ who gives us eternal hope! How do you discover hope? Real hope? That is strong and steadfast! Solid! It is found in the risen Savior... a living... a living hope requires a living faith! It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that elevates Christianity beyond the ancient and archaic religions and superstitions of the past! We have a living hope because we have a living Savior! And hope dawned over two thousand years ago at an empty tomb in Jerusalem and the Son of God shines in our hearts who believe from that day until this day.

We have a Christian hope! We have a hope in Christ! We have therefore a living hope! What the Bible calls the blessed hope, a hope like an anchor steadfast and sure in the storms of life.

What is this hope? What is the dawn of this hope? It is the dawn of a brand new day! Three days later on the first day of the week that living hope was... was born. First Peter chapter 1, verse 3 says: “*We are born again by this living hope.*”

Jesus used those words in talking to a man who couldn’t understand how he could begin life again. He said [John 3:7], “*You must be born again.*” “This life in me... this transformation that I offer is so radical, it is so revolutionary; it is so decisive, so dramatic that when you experience this new birth, it is like being born all over again.” We are born again into a living hope because of the power of Christ’s forgiveness at the cross and because of the power of the resurrection.

When you saw a man taking the cross to die... Before the resurrection men would go to the cross to die. After the resurrection we go to the cross to live! We go to the cross to live a brand new life! You need more than a new start.

I read this past week about a Brit by the name of Ian Usher who had a dream of going down under to Australia and having a great life, and he was well on his way. Seemingly Ian Usher had a perfect life. [He] Had a great job, was making lots of money, had a beautiful wife, exhilarating, exciting hobbies. He had a trendy home there in Australia with all the accouterments and the finery, all the... they had a room for his technology and plasma... he has plasma screens everywhere. He has a pool and a spa outdoors. It’s a magnificent place. [He]

Has lots of friends, got two loyal dogs. Great life! Living the good life. On his website it says that he enjoys skydiving and jet skiing and surfing and snowboarding!

But Ian’s wife left him several months ago and his life began to fall apart. [He] Couldn’t pick up the pieces. So now Ian is having a life sale. You’ve heard of a yard sale, a garage sale? He’s going to sell his life. He’s going on line... EBay and winner-take-all auction for everything. The house, the cars, the clothes, the plasma TV’s, the technology, the dogs... I guess his friends. I don’t know what comes with this deal. But everything he has in July, 2008 will be sold on auction. He’s selling off his life.

And then he says, expecting to take in about a half a million, maybe a million dollars for all this stuff, all this life... He says when it’s done I’m going to take the clothes on my back and my wallet in my pocket along with my passport, and I’m going to get the last seat on the last plane out of Australia and wherever it takes me I’m going to go and try to start over. Selling your life off.

I hope someone tells Ian that he doesn’t need a new start, he needs a new heart. And that someone already bought his life, paid in full at the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ. He died and rose again that he, that we could have a brand new day, a brand new life!

Over the years I’ve been preaching Easter sermons now almost forty years. As a boy preacher sixteen years of age my first message concerned the resurrection of Christ. And I can tell you after all of these years preaching in the resurrection day, I believe it now more than ever because I have seen the power and the passion of Jesus Christ! The message of the resurrection breaking through the darkness like bursts of sunlight in the lives of men and women who were disillusioned by defeat; discouraged in the hopelessness of their own human condition! People facing an... a hopeless end rather than enjoying an endless hope in Jesus Christ! I’m telling you I’ve seen [tap] men and women through the years, broken and damaged by the power of sin who were empty and wasted! Life was a senseless, meaningless joke. I’ve watched as Jesus Christ the living Savior has given them not only hope now, but hope forever! It’s hope that dawns in the heart of those who have been born again. You can be born again today by the power of the [clap] resurrection of Jesus!

But not only is this the dawn of a new day, but this hope is the dawn of a new dynamic... a new dynamic for living! Because you see the power of Jesus Christ is now in us! Easter is for everyday and for everyone who has experienced personally the presence of Christ... the power of the resurrection. And so even in our darkest days and our longest nights as believers in Christ we have a new power, a new strength to face with fortitude and courage the problems and the perplexities of our lives, to win life’s battles, to overcome in every situation in life. This is the power of the resurrection in us. We who were not a people... we were nothing, we were nobodies, because we have received mercy we now live in the light, we walk in the light of His power and of His grace.

Now I want you to remember the man who wrote these words concerning this new life and this new birth and this new day and this new dynamic. Simon Peter, who walked with Christ, and when it came to the end, Peter lied and Jesus died. Peter was so broken, but it was in his brokenness because of the resurrection... because of the love of Christ, it was in his brokenness and his weakness that he found strength and the power to become the man God made him to be. The man who had a yellow streak running down his back when he faced the enemies of Christ and denied the Lord once, after the resur... once, after the resurrection was experienced, he stood boldly proclaiming that Jesus lives!

I’m telling you there’s no failure, no sin, no shame, no grief, no issue in our lives but that that power of Jesus Christ will enable us and strengthen us! This is why Jesus, who lives in us, wants to take command of our destiny, command of our decision, command of our days, because He is Lord and He is love. He wants to live in

you fully and completely. [Colossians 1:27] *“Christ in you the hope of glory... Christ in you the hope of glory.”* If you’re a believer, He lives in you.

Therefore, He deserves all that we are and all that we have. We give our bodies to Him as a living sacrifice. Our eyes are to be the eyes of Christ, seeing the world in desperate need; weeping at times over the lostness. Our faces should shine with the countenance of Christ in us, with the joy of a Savior who lives in us! Our very faces should shine with the beauty of Jesus! Our ears should be the ears of Christ, open to the cries of mercy all around us! Our hands, the hands of Christ, working. Our feet, the feet of Christ, walking. Our heart, the heart of God in Christ, beating! This is our life in Christ! Our lips should be the lips of Christ, telling His story to the world! It’s Christ in you a new dynamic! We have a new reason to get up every day! A new passion for living because this hope is abundant!

Allow the living Christ to fill you and flood your heart, to energize your body, to take control of your mind, your will, your ambitions, your career, your family, your everything! Jesus doesn’t want a guest room at the back of the house; Jesus who is Lord is the life of our life, and He is the dynamic presence that fills us everyday! I’m telling you right now Jesus is alive in me! And He is alive in you who have called upon His name! [scattered applause]

Secondly... thirdly, rather, the dawn of a new hope... the dawn of this hope means a brand new destiny... a brand new destiny! For Peter tells us in verse 4 that this resurrection of Jesus produces an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you. The ultimate and final question of death... of death is answered at Easter because of the resurrection.

If you go to a cemetery... a graveyard, you can learn one of the most important lessons in life by just looking at the tombstones, the gravestones, the markers, because when you look at the markers, they are all different sizes... some very simple, some ah... very ornate and unusual. But if you look at a gravestone, you see several things. You notice several things. One, your name is there, and then your birth date, and your death date. It’s a sobering reminder when you look at these tombstones of how short life is and how sure death is. You have to wonder when you look, especially in old graveyards, what was their life like? What... what did they do? What were their thoughts? What were their dreams? What were their ambitions?

You can’t choose your birth date. You probably didn’t choose your name. You have no choice about where you were born. You have little if anything to say about your death date. But there’s one more thing on that tombstone. Engraved there is a dash, a brief line. And while you can’t say anything about your death date or choose your birth date, you have a lot to say about what goes in that line, what’s in the dash.

And if you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, this is what makes the dash matter. Our days on earth... they matter when we know Jesus and the power of His resurrection! There’s no place that echoes with eternity quite like a cemetery! We do have something to say about our lives! We have been given a living hope in Jesus Christ! So live! It’s... it’s not the number of breaths that we take but the number of breathtaking moments that we make [tap] in following [tap] Jesus [tap] Christ [tap]! Following [tap] Him [tap] in the power of His mercy and His grace!

Hope gives life to life! And that’s my prayer for you this Easter, that you will experience life to the fullest in Him! I love what Warren Wiersbe says about hope. “Hope is not a sedative; it is a shot of adrenaline! A blood transfusion! Hope doesn’t put us in a rocking chair, waiting for the Second Coming; hope makes us alive and active, loving God and loving people that Jesus loves.”

This is the life [tap] that you’ve been given! So many people die with their miracle... their music still in them! Why? Because they’re always going to live! They’re always getting ready to live! And then they die and

life you've never lived! This is your life right now! This moment! Don't waste it; live it in the power of God's Spirit! He has given us a new destiny every day. Now life matters forever and He has given us a future and a hope.

You know a lot of people have a full life but they don't have a fulfilling life. Only your life is full of stuff, your life is full of activity, your life is full of career and family and running here and there! Your life is so full, you... you feel like you're rushing about, pushing through. Feel the stress, anxiety! Your life is so full! But is it fulfilling?

To know Jesus Christ is to experience a fulfilling life. What your family needs is you fully and forever alive in Christ. What the people at your office need is you, fully and forever alive in Christ. What your children... what your friends need is you fully and forever alive in Jesus Christ! This is the hope we have in Him.

If you are a baseball fan like I am, hope springs eternal in the heart of a real fan. So that's why it's Spring training, and I believe this is the year the Rangers win the pennant. [laughter] One of the reasons [pastor chuckles] [laughter] (It's hard to say that with a straight face right now.) [laughter] But one of the reasons that we are hopeful... we have a new player by the name of Josh Hamilton.

Recently Josh Hamilton who is a centerfielder with five skills to play the great game. He's an incredible ballplayer. But he shared his testimony with his teammates and it was reported in the news media. He said, "I want to let you know how far I've come and tell you where I've been," and Josh tells his story. Drafted in 1999 as the number one pick across America, the greatest player in the country according to the draft pick. It wasn't long until his life spiraled into drug addiction, addiction to alcohol, a series of very bad choices. He said, "I would wake up night after night in strange places, thinking that perhaps this is the night I won't wake up." After another night of bad decisions, going to bed," he said, "with my heart speeding, my heart speeding inside my chest like it was about to burst through my skin. My thinking was clouded and my talent was one day away from being totally wasted."

And here's what Josh then said, "I prayed to be spared another day of guilt and depression and addiction. I couldn't continue living the life of a crack addict, and I couldn't stop either. It was a horrible downward spiral that I had to pull out of or die. I lay there in a hot and dirty trailer in the North Carolina countryside at a stranger's house in the cab of my pickup and prayed the Lord would take me away from the nightmare my life had become."

He stands now on the green grass of a major league outfield and so he wonders aloud in his witness: How did I get from there to here, on the green grass of a professional field? His wife Katy and her family believed in him and prayed for him. And as a result he came to faith in Jesus Christ. He found the power to overcome his sin and his addiction, and to break through into a brand new life. His wife, who believed in him, says, "God has a bigger plan for you." He said no one, even myself, could believe it. But he said, "Now my mission (listen to this) is to be the ray of hope, the guy who stands out there in a beautiful field and owns up to his mistakes and lets people know it's never completely hopeless, no matter how bad it seems at times. I have a platform and a message and now I go to bed every night sober and happy, praying that I will be a good messenger for Christ!" He said, "I know why I'm here. So that people can look to me and see a man who is proof positive that hope is never lost!"

No matter your failure, no matter your sin, no matter your habits, your hang-ups, your hurts, hope in Jesus Christ is never lost! Josh says that when he was ah... coming out of his addiction, getting clean, he began to have a dream. He said, "When I was addicted, I didn't dream or couldn't remember them." He said, "I slept the numb, mindless, dre... ah... ah... sleep of... of a man who couldn't think." But when he was coming off ah... the addiction, he began to have a dream, and he said it was a nightmare that took place every single night. He

said, I... I was... I was up against the devil; he was hideous and strong and powerful.” He said, “You don’t have to believe this,” he said, “but I’m telling you it’s true. I dreamed this dream every night. The devil was coming against me and I had a bat in my hand and I... I kept knocking him down, and every time I would knock him down, he would get back up and come at me again fierce... more fierce than ever! And I would knock him down and he would get back up!” [He] Said, “Several weeks later, after I was clean, that dream went away.”

But after he became... was reintroduced into the major leagues and professional baseball reinstated him; he began to redevelop his career, he said the dream came back. “So once again I was fighting against the enemy. I was fighting against the devil. And I would... I would... I would knock him down; he would get right back up. It just seemed that he was too strong; that I couldn’t overcome him, that I couldn’t defeat him. I knocked him down and he got back up! And I was getting ready to quit when I felt a presence by my side. So I looked and there was Jesus, standing there with me, and this time when we knocked him down, he didn’t get up! He didn’t get up!” [applause] And Josh says, “Alone I couldn’t win this battle, but with Jesus I couldn’t lose!”

One day at the cross the devil was raging against the souls of men. We couldn’t beat him down, couldn’t beat him back. But Jesus took the powerful cross and because of the resurrection He knocked the devil down and out and we have a strength now and forever to overcome and to live in the dawn of a new day, and a new dynamic and a new destiny forever with Him! And that is the live hope of Christ! [extended applause]

Would you bow your heads with me in prayer? Every head bowed, every eye closed. Right now pray and receive Christ into your life. You can’t do this alone. You can’t win life’s battles and struggles on your own. Life is hopeless apart from the living hope of Jesus. You can be born again right now. Pray this prayer in your heart.

*Lord Jesus, I trust in You. (The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, so just say...)  
Jesus, I turn from my sin, I renounce my sin and I receive You, trust in You as my Lord and my Savior.*

Just a simple prayer of faith. Pray and receive Christ into your life right now. And when we stand together and sing on this Easter morning in just a moment a hymn of decision, make this decision your destiny as you follow Christ. Your decision determines your destiny. [music begins] You have a choice to make: either to receive Jesus, to believe and to live in the life and the love of Christ forever, or to walk out of here into the darkness, into a future without God and without hope. Choose Christ, choose hope, choose life and come to Jesus today.

*Lord, I pray that you would enable us to live for you in the power of Your Spirit each day and for these who come to You for the first time this morning, give them grace and mercy. Help them to walk out of the darkness and into Your marvelous light. For we pray in Jesus’ name. AMEN*

Would you stand with me, please? Our ministers are here at the lower level, also upstairs in the balcony for all of you seated upstairs. We’re waiting for you to come and confess Christ. Don’t let the crowd keep you away. Don’t let, you know, what others may think... don’t let anything keep you from Jesus today. Come down this aisle and confess Christ. We’ll help you.

You say, I don’t know what I’m getting into. You come with an open heart, with faith in Christ and we’ll share with you how you can know Christ and how your life can be changed, how you can know for certain that you’re going to heaven.

There are others who need a church home. Prestonwood is a church you can call home. I want to invite you to join this church today and to be a faithful member of... of this congregation and to share the risen Christ with others. You come, lead the way; set the example for others who will follow you to Christ. God bless you on your way right now. Come.