

TASTE & SEE

Exploring the heart of the Christian message of hope over four meals.



Meal Number 4

Week Four

Future Hope



Meal Number 4: Future Hope



Leader's introductory notes

Week 4. Overview

This final meal is an international banquet in celebration of the new life that is offered by Jesus. We focus on the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. We consider the impact of Jesus' resurrection on the future hope for our world - a hope that changes everything for us today and offers "Good news of great joy for all people."

On The Menu: An International Banquet

You could choose to invite guests to bring a plate of their favourite international food to share. This has the advantage of creating a lovely opportunity for guests to contribute and share stories about their offerings. OR you could cater using a mix of dishes and nationalities. Curries work well. Eg Thai or Indian for mains with Portuguese Tarts, Florentine biscuits, Gelato or pavlova nests with cream and berries for dessert is an easy option.

Decor

Dress it up a bit. Make it special with white tablecloths with coloured saris! Champagne glasses, candles. Nice crockery and cutlery.



Presenter Script

This last session invites people to consider where they sit with what they have heard. They may or may not be ready to follow Jesus yet but either way, the natural next step is to invite people to get to know Jesus better, by reading one of the Gospels. For example. Christianity Explored offers a 7-10 week journey through Mark's Gospel, or Simply Christianity goes through Luke. Both work in a small group or one to one.

Blue is where we have provided various options in the footnotes.

Orange represents interactive elements, discussion questions and visual aids.



Suggested formatting of the night

- 7pm Arrival, welcome, mingle, seating
- 7:15 Presenter welcome everyone back.
- 7:20 Mains served - Ice breaker discussion over dinner.
Session 4 Presentation (first half) - over / after dinner
- 7:45ish Dessert break - discussion over dessert
- 7:55 Continue Session 4 (second half)
- 8:10 Personal Faith Story #4
- 8:20 Q&A and Feedback Forms
- 9pm Wrap up and thanks.

Meal Number 4: Future Hope

Presenter Script



Welcome back to Week 4 of Taste & See—our final session – an international banquet!

Today we are enjoying (eg, *Indian curries... Portuguese tarts... Italian Florentines*)

Starter: As we enjoy an international banquet tonight, our theme is Future Hope. As we look around at our strife-filled, war-weary world, many are wondering, is there any hope? What does God’s story have to say?

According to the Bible, this is all wrapped up in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which we will be looking at in this final session.

Discussion To kick us off, let’s start on a lighter note though. As you pass the food can you discuss: What is the most wonderful banquet you have been to? / **OR** What is your favourite international food?

----- serve food and begin eating -----

Last week we ended with the execution of Jesus.

We saw how Jesus used the Passover meal the night before, to describe the significance of his death. We saw how at the heart of the Christian faith is the story of the greatest rescue - that Jesus came and willingly died in our place, to rescue us from the judgement we rightly deserve.

If the first century biographies of Jesus had ended with his death, we might have concluded that Jesus was another great martyr of history. However, all the Gospels are emphatic that the story did not end there. They claim he was raised to life and appeared physically and bodily to them. This week we want to think about what the resurrection of Jesus means, what the Christian hope is, and what it all means for us today.

Last week we focussed on what Jesus has saved us FROM. This week our focus is on what Jesus has saved us FOR.



Let's pick up where we left off last week and hear an example from part of Luke's account of Jesus' resurrection, where Jesus turns up and joins them for (you guessed it) a meal!

Read Luke 24:36 - 45 open up the Luke's Gospels page number___, and read together (invite someone to read).

There are a few things worth stopping to notice in this account:

- They were shocked and full of doubt. These weren't gullible people and they weren't expecting a resurrection.
- Jesus was raised in his body. He was someone they could touch and see. They ate a meal together. He was not a ghost.
- Jesus explains what has happened to him using the Old Testament Scriptures

Is it true?

The Bible says Jesus was raised from the dead. The disciples believed he was? But is it true?

This is a point at which the Christian faith puts itself up for public inspection. Here it offers a basis on which to assess its credibility. If the resurrection is untrue, you can safely walk away from the Christian faith. Without a resurrected Jesus it is at best a nice story, or at worst a massive fraud.

But if it is true the resurrection puts Jesus in a league of his own. Something we should take very seriously. The resurrection of Jesus is something you can investigate historically. And, surprisingly, the evidence for it is surprisingly strong. It's not presented as a myth, or a merely symbolic event, but an event that actually happened in our world.

One of the things we'd love to encourage anyone to do who is investigating the Christian faith is to explore the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. Because if that is true it changes everything! At the end of this course, we can provide you with some resources to help you in exploring more if those are your questions.

However, in this meal tonight, we wanted to focus more on the **meaning** of the resurrection of Jesus. According to the Bible, the

resurrection of Jesus is not just true, it's exciting! If we can put it in one sentence: In Jesus we see hope for the future. Spring has come. The fruit is here. New life has budded on the tree of our weak and weary world. New life has started, and it can't be stopped. That's good news!

First fruits: The New Creation Now and Then

One of the New Testament writers, Paul (whose own life was turned upside down when he met the risen Jesus,) put it like this...

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 (The Bible)

How does the new creation impact life now? The Bible says that, in the resurrection of Jesus, it is a bit like seeing the first-fruits of the coming harvest.

In New Testament times, farmers were dependent on their crops for survival. They needed to stretch their supplies carefully across the winter. As supplies ran down, families would look out over their trees, hoping for the first fruits. When they appeared, it was a time of celebration. Why? *Because the first fruits were a tangible sign of the good thing coming.* Once the first fruits were on the tree, you knew the rest of the harvest was on its way.

Most of us have a hunch that there is more to life. (image of galaxies) The resurrection of Jesus means there is! Jesus is the guarantee that there is hope beyond the grave for all who belong to him. The resurrection of Jesus is the tangible sign that God will bring new life and restoration to our world.

The resurrection and the future hope

Discussion What images come to mind when we talk about life beyond death? (Harps.. clouds.. angels... or shows such as 'The Good Place' on Netflix...)

What sort of hope does the resurrection speak of? In the Bible it is pictured (no prizes for guessing this one!) as a meal. A grand banquet. (Of course it is!)

As we have said before, the Bible begins and ends with meals. The first words of God to humans are an invitation to eat; the first conflict in the Bible is over a forbidden meal; Jesus explains what he has come to do over a symbol laden meal.

The end of the Bible is pictured as a massive feast featuring all the nations and cultures of the world.

Jesus puts it like this:

People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

- Jesus (Luke 13:29)

And it's a banquet we are all invited to join.

The invitation of God

At the beginning of the course, you were invited to a series of dinner parties. Today, as we finish, we want to share God's invitation to the best dinner party of all—the dinner party of the new creation..

The last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, paints a picture (like an artist, not a scientist) of God's future new creation.

What stands out to you as you hear this...? (Option - give time to reflect and draw one of the symbols that most stands out to you.)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22:1-5 (The Bible)

This passage is rich with metaphors. I wonder what stood out most to you....

The Bible begins with a garden, but it ends with a garden-city. It's teeming with life. There's a huge river running through it. Life-giving water flowing from God.

There are bountiful fruit trees bearing fruit, not just every year, but every month. The tree of life is there. But it's bigger and better than before and somehow, it brings healing to the nations. There is no more night. And no more curse. (Genesis 3) It's our world, and yet not our world. It's our world, but bigger, better, more fertile, more fruitful, more lush. It's our world made new.

This is a picture of what Jesus referred to as Gods' coming Kingdom. Notice who is on the throne...the repeated phrase "*the throne of God and of the Lamb*"— Jesus is the Lamb—his life given in sacrifice for us. He rules as King in God's kingdom.

And what are we doing in that renewed world? Look at the last sentence: "*And they will reign forever.*" What are we doing? What we were always meant to do! Not floating around on clouds playing harps, but ruling and reigning over God's creation, bringing order and goodness to the world. Who knows? Maybe we are playing sport, building projects, starting organisations, farming, investing, working together. Whatever it is, at that point we are, fully and finally, bearing God's image to the creation like we were always meant to. The new creation will not be a place where we say to each other, "Who are you?" Rather, it will be a place where we can say to each other: "Wow! I always knew you had that in you! Now I can see what you were always meant to be."

Heaven when you die?

All of this addresses the common misconception that Christianity all about going to heaven when you die. The Bible's future hope is much bigger and bolder than that! God's plan is to make heaven and earth new. To restore all things. [\(It is, as one writer said, to make "everything that is bad will become untrue. And it will be more glorious and better for it."\)](#)

God, in other words, is determined to continue with Plan A. His original plan was to share his rule of the universe with his image bearers and, in spite of sin and evil, that's what he's going to do.

Christian hope is not about the end but the beginning. It's not the end like a curtain call and the applause of the theatre. It is, rather, the beginning of something much better. It is the beginning of sharing God's rule with God in a world without sin and suffering.

..... **Optional Dessert break**

Discussion moment: As you reflect on the bible's picture of future hope for our world, what resonates with you most? What questions does this raise for you?

Interlude: Suffering

This, of course, raises the question of why God allowed suffering in the first place. We can't say everything there is to be said on this topic here, but we can say something.

When we go through suffering we tend to ask, "Why?" Why is this happening? Interestingly, the Bible's characteristic question of suffering is not "Why?" but "for how long?" The logic goes something like this: God is good. God's goodness cannot co-exist with evil and suffering forever.. At some point God will banish these from his world. It's not a question of whether, but how long?

The Bible holds out the promise that one day God will wipe every tear from every eye. As we discussed last week, there is comfort in the knowledge that He will judge sin and sinners, evil and those who cause it. God hears our cry for justice and he will answer it.

More than that, in Jesus God has entered into our suffering. Whatever else we say about God and suffering, we can't say he doesn't know what it's like! God, in Jesus, has been there too. He has come into our mess and suffered sorrow, the betrayal of friends, pain, unjust accusations, shame, and ultimately death for our sake.

But the resurrection means that one day, because he has conquered death and is on the throne, he will bring sin and evil to account and he

will put everything right. He will evaluate every life lived. That's good news if you want to see evil banished and those who do evil brought to account. But it is also sobering news for all of us, because we will all stand before the same God to give an account. The only sure hope of standing before God and being found "not guilty" comes through Jesus.

The new creation is not about us, it's about God

You might have noticed in the reading that the new creation is not us-focussed, but God-focussed. More specifically, it's Jesus-focussed. Listen to what it says in Revelation 7:9-10:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Jesus (represented here as the Lamb—remember the lamb in the Passover meal last week?) is the one being celebrated. And he is being celebrated, in particular, for his 'salvation'. He is being praised for the success of his rescue mission. Because of what he did, by laying down his life, a huge crowd from every nation can now stand, united before God, having been made right with God by Jesus.

Following Jesus Now

As we get to the end of our course, we want to finish with an invitation. It's an invitation to be part of God's banquet. An opportunity to begin life with God that starts now. An invitation, in other words, to follow Jesus.

What does it look like to follow Jesus now? To get there, let's go back to that last meal Jesus had with his friends and pick up where we left off.

Read Luke 24:46-49 read together from Luke's Gospels

We don't have to guess what Jesus thought the appropriate response was to his life, death and resurrection. Jesus tells us! Verse 47 talks about "repentance" leading to forgiveness" as the way to respond to Jesus.

“Repentance” means to turn toward Jesus. To turn away from living life without him to living life for him. Repentance is what the younger son did in Luke’s story. He turned around and came home and was reconciled to his father. And repentance is what the father in that story invited the older son to do. To come in from the outside, and join the party.

When we repent, God promises us forgiveness and restoration. Through Jesus’ great rescue we can trust that God will receive us back. We can be confident that he will forgive us and we can come into a new relationship with him. In fact, according to Jesus, there is a great party in heaven when just one person comes home.

I hope that you have had a taste of what that is like through some of the personal faith stories that we have shared over the last few weeks.

It is a wonderful thing to have certainty about our relationship with God, not based on how well we perform, but based on what Jesus has done for us. It is wonderful to know the depth of his love for you and to experience his peace in this life now and hope in the future because of him. I wonder if that is something you have taken hold of yet?

The Next Step

This is the end of our course. Thanks for joining us on this journey over these four weeks! (overview slide) We hope you have found it a helpful way to consider the grand narrative of the Christian faith for yourself.

What should you do next?

First, be curious. I think whatever stage of faith you are at, that’s good advice. Be curious. Continue to poke and probe the claims of Jesus. If you’ve never answered who you think Jesus is, why not? It’s a question worth answering.

If the significance of Jesus is still “in play” for you, that’s fine. Keep going! Perhaps you have lots more questions. We’ve only just scratched the surface here. Let us encourage you to take the opportunity to read one of the New Testament Gospels for yourself, ideally in a group. We will be running another series soon, [Christianity Explored, that goes through \(Mark’s\) Gospel, \(your choice here\)](#) and

we'd love to help you continue the journey if you are interested. Feel free to come along to church anytime!

If you've got all you wanted from this group, no worries. Thanks for coming!

But it might be that you're ready now to start life with Jesus. What would that look like to start? Simple. It would look like turning (repenting) toward God and trusting him for forgiveness and new life.

Let's hear God's invitation for us to become his people from the Old Testament book of Isaiah 55:1-3

*Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
²Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.
³Give ear and come to me;
listen, that you may live.*

This might be an invitation you are ready to take up now. If so, here is a prayer that you could pray that expresses that to God

*Dear God,
I'm sorry that I have been trying to live my life without you at the centre.
Thank you for sending your Son Jesus to die the death I deserved to die to pay a debt I couldn't pay.
Thank you that he rose again and is alive today.
Father, please forgive me and help me to live from now on following you as my Lord and my God. Amen.*

Let us know if that is where you are up to. We'd love to support you in that journey. (Share feedback card here)

Personal Faith Story

Q&A

Collect Feedback Forms.

*We've left this to you to create your way with your follow up options.
This could be a physical card to fill in on the night.
OR a QR code with a link to a digital form.*

Chat. Make time to catch up again in other ways...

EXTRA RESOURCES

"If I was God, I'd end all the Pain" - John Dickson.

*"Confronting Christianity" Rebecca McLaughlin
(Chapter 11 How could a loving God allow so much suffering?)*

Questioning Christianity - Dan Patterson
<https://www.questioningchristianity.com/resources/blog-post-title-four-yewzt-lzwmq-69gd7>

"The Problem of Pain" CS Lewis

"A Grief Observed" CS Lewis

Podcast: Undeceptions <https://undeceptions.com/podcast/> - Library

Centre for Public Christianity - Library
<https://www.publicchristianity.org>

"The Case for Christ" Lee Strobel