

Easter: The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ

Resurrection Sunday, April 9, 2023

Thesis: We gather today to celebrate the good news of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, which includes his birth, life, suffering, sacrifice, death, resurrection, ascension, and return.

Text: John 20:1-18; 11:21-26

Sermon:

If you were to ask people around the world what they think is the biggest day of the year for Christians, what would most people say? Most people will say "Christmas." Obviously, Christmas is a significant holiday where we celebrate the birth of Christ, God's gift to us (Isaiah 9:1-7). So, we give gifts to one another, and we tell the story of Christ the Lord.

The true answer to the question—What is the biggest day of the year for Christians? -- is Easter. "This is the moment of new creation. If it hadn't been for Easter, nobody would ever have dreamed of celebrating Christmas. This is the first day of God's new week. The darkness has gone, and the sun is shining." (NT Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21*, p. 143.)

Let's read the story of Easter, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, from John 20:1fl.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two

angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her (John 20:1-18).

Not only is the resurrection of Jesus the biggest day for Christians in the calendar year, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that central moment in human history.

After having truly assumed human nature and submitted to an agonizing and shameful public death, the eternal Son of God was truly raised from the dead in his glorified physical body, no longer subject to decay and death. His resurrection validates his identity as the divine Son of God, demonstrates his irrevocable victory over death and the grave, and secures both the present salvation and future physical resurrection of believers.

At the time that the events of the New Testament occurred, the resurrection of the dead was a concept very familiar to the Jewish people, who anticipated that it would take place at the end of all things (Dan. 12:2–3).

In fact, Martha believes that Jesus is referring to this resurrection when he explains that her brother Lazarus "will rise again" (John 11:23). Undoubtedly having heard the same reassurance from others offering their condolences, Martha replies that she knows "he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (John 11:24). The weight of Jesus' response, that he *is* "the resurrection and the life," must have increased once Martha saw her brother, dead by then four days, walk out of his tomb (John 11:38–44).

Just as with the story of Lazarus, the enigmatic promises in the Old Testament of the Messiah's resurrection were brought into sharp focus after the event had taken place (John 20:9). In fact, Jesus' revelation to his disciples on the road to Emmaus shows **that the death and resurrection of Christ is a central proclamation of the Old Testament** (Luke 24:25–27). In addition to the Old Testament prophecies, the resurrection of Christ was repeatedly and specifically proclaimed beforehand several times by the Lord himself (Matt 12:38–40; Mark 8:31; 9:34; 10:34; Luke 9:22), and even when the disciples find the tomb empty, they must be reminded of what Jesus had said concerning his own resurrection (Luke 24:6–7). When the disciples finally encounter the resurrected Christ, they find his body not to be a phantom or a mirage, but truly flesh and blood: he insists that Thomas physically touch him (John 20:24–29), and he eats regular food (John 21:9–14). The “heavenly” body to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15:40 is the resurrected body, one beyond the reach of death.

The New Testament insists that Christ's resurrection bears strong and everlasting consequences. It validates Christ's claim to be the Son of God (Acts 2:22–36); it also validates his teaching as being from God (Matt. 12:38–40). The resurrection event also stands as evidence of the Lord's victory over death and the grave (1 Cor. 15:54–55; Rev. 1:17–18), and it secures our salvation (Rom. 4:25; 10:9–10; Heb. 7:23–25; 1 Pet. 1:3). As such, the resurrection of Jesus serves as the precursor for the resurrection of believers (1 Cor. 15:20), who have been “buried with him in baptism” (Col. 2:12), will be raised with him (2 Cor 4:14), and “will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:1–4), having been made “like him” (1 John 3:2).

The resurrection of Christ holds a central place in Christian theology: everything is built upon this foundational event. Without the reality of the resurrection our salvation is nothing but a sham, the proclamation of the gospel is utterly pointless, and Christians are to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:14–19). But, as Paul reassures us, Christ has indeed been raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20) and his union with believers ensures our own future physical resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13–18). The early church testified to this connection between the Lord's empty tomb and our own with the final lines of the Apostles' Creed: “I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.” (Zachary Lycans, “Jesus' Resurrection,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).)

As I prayed for us today, I wanted us to ponder what Jesus said to Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus. Let's read John 20:21-26.

John 11:21–26 (NIV84): “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Today, I am praying that you would have an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is my prayer for you in this room and online today:

Lord, this Easter weekend, may people experience you looking at them, face to face, with eyes of fire, fiery love.

May they experience you and encounter you like Martha did.

Martha believed correct theology. There is a resurrection for everyone at the end, some to life in God and some to separation from God.

But you looked her in the eyes and said, *“I am the resurrection and the life.... Do you believe this?”*

You showed the two people on the road to Emmaus who you were from the entire OT. You opened their eyes from beginning to end about the centrality of the resurrection as a key message of the OT.

You speak to those who are good, who are religious, and who are even involved in church. Your desire from Genesis in the garden, when you made a covering for us, to the Passover, when you made a way where there was no way through the sacrificial lamb and blood, to the end in Revelation 5:8-9, where you purchased us for God with your blood from every tongue, tribe, language, and nation... you did it all because of your eternal purposes... and because you love each of us individually.

O God, help us to see Jesus looking each of us in the eyes today with fiery eyes of passionate love, calling us into eternal life, which has broken into this life... eternal life that is fellowship, love, and experience in Jesus now and forever.

Some people are counting on their goodness, their works, their efforts. They are good. May each of them have an encounter with you, the Righteous One.

Some people believe they have blown it too badly. They have sinned away their chance or hope of change or redemption. May each of them have an encounter with you, the One who takes away the sin of the entire world.

Praise the Lord!

Dear Lord:

I am so excited about today and celebrating Easter. Praise the name of the Lord God Almighty.

Forever you have conquered sin, death, and Satan. Forever you reign on high. Forever your kingdom is established and secure.

Forever you have transferred your family from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Light. Praise your Holy Name.

Forever your Spirit will dwell in us. Forever we will dwell in your presence, Father God. Forever we will know you face to face, Lord Jesus. What joy is ours!!

Forever you have shown us how we were supposed to live, Lord Jesus, out of intimacy with the Father and dependency upon the Holy Spirit. Forever you are the Last Adam, redeeming humanity and elevating us to our high calling to God.

Forever you will be our Bridegroom King.

Forever you will be our High Priest.

Forever you will be our Righteous Judge.

To God be the glory forever and forever.

Praise the Lord God Almighty.

Invitation:

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 20:25-26).

What about you? Do you believe this?

I invite you to receive God's gift of love and life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I invite you to follow the Lord Jesus Christ from this day forward, with the Holy Spirit helping you.

I invite you to God the Father through Jesus Christ, the Son, who has made the way for us to know the Living God. May you spend this life and the next life getting to know God, your God.

And, may you partner with Jesus who is on mission in your spheres of influence, together with others, so that his name and his fame will spread throughout the earth, and so that his kingdom will expand and have no end.

Ministry Time: