

1. Easter: Greatest of all the Christian holy days – celebrating our Risen Lord

A. Today we have the opportunity to proclaim one of the central truth of our faith – the resurrection!

Thought: But the resurrection is one of those Christian truths that is under attack

A. There are those who have trouble with this though that actually Jesus rose from the dead

1). They see this as a nice little myth that sprung up – a good story to tell

“The world has its Easter eggs and Easter bunny – you have a risen God. Whatever!”

a). But so what. If He rose or if He didn’t, doesn’t really affect my life.

B. Since there may be people here who feel that way – I want to address that

1). I want to try to prove why the resurrection is a big deal – that it changed everything

Transition: I want to show you why the church believes the resurrection did take place

A. That it wasn’t just a legend or a myth to spice up our Easter holiday

1). We believe the resurrection was an actual historic event

B. And we believe there is evidence to back that up – let’s look at that – have to be quick

I. EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION

1. The evidence of scripture

A. Both Old and New Testaments speak of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

1). Since we believe there is enough evidence to prove the Bible is a reliable – accurate book

Since we believe it can be proved it is God’s book – we believe what it says about the resurrection

2. The evidence of eyewitnesses

Listen to the words of Christ: 1 Co 15:3–8 (ESV) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: *that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures*, ⁽⁴⁾ that he was buried, *that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*, ⁽⁵⁾ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁽⁶⁾ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, *most of whom are still alive*, though some have fallen asleep. ⁽⁷⁾ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁽⁸⁾ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

A. That’s powerful! Paul says He rose just like God’s word said He would

1). Then he challenges them to investigate it – go to Jerusalem there was over 500 eyewitnesses

Most of them are still alive – talk to them – they will tell you what they’ve seen

Point: You don’t challenge people to investigate when you’re telling a lie

3. The evidence of the Apostles who were willing to die for their faith

A. The one’s who taught the resurrection – said they saw the resurrection

1). We’re willing to die for the one they said resurrected

B. Every Apostle died as a martyr except John who was exiled to Patmos a prison island

Point: You don’t die for a lie you’ve made up

A. But they KNEW Christ had risen from the dead

Therefore they knew they would rise from the dead – that death was the doorway to real life

B. They went to their death willingly because they believed that Jesus promise was true

Jn 11:25 (ESV) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, *though he die, yet shall he live*

1). They didn’t view the grave as an enemy – it was just a servant to escort Him into glory

Listen to Paul: Php 1:21 (ESV) For to me to live is Christ, *and to die is gain*.

C. And what a life it will be – what a future is in store

I like how one writer described it: Take the deepest enchantment that you have ever known, the loftiest ecstasy that you have ever felt. Take that moment when you felt most totally alive. Then intensify that instant a million fold, and perhaps you will be getting within range of imagining what heaven is like.

4. We have the evidence of a multitude of changed lives

2 Co 5:17 (ESV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

- A. God saved me and I was radically changed! Wasn't my doing. He did it. Radically. Instantaneously
- B. Why? Because He's alive. This isn't just a cold religion.

- 1). I came into a relationship with Almighty God – He came into my life
And nothing has been the same since

This is what happens to believers: Eze 36:26 (ESV) And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

- a). That is a Christian – new heart – new desires – new power = new creation
- b). The reason that happens is because Christ is alive!

Transition: Evidence of Scripture. Eyewitnesses. The martyrdom of the Apostles. Changed lives.

- A. One more. Let's turn to secular sources

5. The evidence from a secular historian

Josephus 1st century secular historian: "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was such a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews, and also many of the Greeks. *This man was the Christ.* And when *Pilate had condemned him to the cross,* upon his impeachment by the principle man among us, those who had loved from the first did not forsake him, *for He appeared on the third day,* the divine prophets having spoken these and thousands of other wonderful things about him. And even now, the race of Christians so named from him, has not died out."

- A. Here is a secular historian living at that time. *He died on the cross and appeared on the third day*

Transition: So I want to proclaim today as a believer – we are confident the resurrection took place

That it was an actual, historical event and that there is ample evidence to prove it

- A. We do believe that this does matter to everybody in this room – let's look at that
 - 1). I want to look at the horrifying repercussions if Jesus remained in that grave for all of us
 - 2). And then the glorious benefits the resurrection brings into our lives for those who receive Christ

I. WHAT IF JESUS DID NOT RISE FROM THE DEAD?

If there is no resurrection what does that mean? You don't want this.

FIRST: If Jesus didn't Rise from the dead - The Bible is a Useless Book

1. No resurrection: We might as well get rid of our NT

- A. Whole of NT hangs on fact: Jesus is who He said He was and could do what He said He would do
 - 1). If He didn't raise from the dead like He said He would then *He is a liar!*
 - 2). AND if He is a liar THEN He can't be God because the Bible tells us God cannot lie

Point: The NT would be nothing more than the account of a deluded dreamer

- A. A man who talked of powers He didn't have and deeds He couldn't do
Just another madman claiming to be God – insane asylums are full of them
- B. So the NT becomes a book we cannot trust – a fairy tale – toss it out

2. No resurrection: Then get rid of the OT too

- A. The OT is a book that looks forward to the Messiah. To Jesus. It's all about Him
 - 1). It predicts His birth, death, *resurrection*, return and His second coming

Point: If there is no resurrection the OT is no more helpful than the NT – it is filled with lies too

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead our Bible is useless

SECOND: If Jesus Didn't Rise from the Dead We Have No Hope Beyond this Life

1. The Grave becomes the end - the victor - this life becomes all we have

- A. To think of this brief existence as the only hope we have for meaning & satisfaction is so sad

Listen to the words of Bertrand Russel famous atheist: "The life of a man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, toward a goal which few can hope to reach and where none may tarry long. One by one as they march our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death. Brief and powerless is man's life. On him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. ...condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness..."

- 1). There is life without resurrection – the grave will win – always wins – and it ends everything
"Your life is brief and powerless you will be seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death"
 - a). Just life without meaning – filled with pain and loss
- 2). Sad. Bertrand Russel was born into a Christian home – taught to believe in God
 - a). But he rejected God and became an outspoken atheist
 - b). His daughter said about him
"Somewhere at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it"

Point: Without the resurrection we are given over to despair

- A. What's it all for – just to work so hard to try and survive and then die - that's it!
- B. I remember before I was a Christian – I was talking to a guy at work – maybe a Christian
He said. "You can't just die. Be put in the ground and eternal darkness. There has to be more than that"
 - 1). That haunted me – that couldn't be it – this life and then nothing beyond this

Transition: Without the resurrection there is no hope for an unbeliever to find meaning by turning to Christ

- A. But what about the believer "In Christ" – if there is no resurrection this may even be more tragic

2. The believer without resurrection

- A. At least the unbeliever hasn't believed a lie! He's got it right – this life is all there is = no future
- 1). But if there isn't a resurrection – the believer's hope is based on a hoax – we've been duped
1 Cor 15:17-19 (NIV) And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. (18) Then those also who have fallen asleep (died) in Christ are lost. (19) If only for this life we have hope in Christ, *we are to be pitied more than all men.*
 - a). We've put our hope in a lie – wasted our whole life on a deception

Thought: What about all those martyrs who died in the hope of being resurrected

Who were given the chance of recanting and living but refused – looking forward to a better life

- A. I think of Polycarp – one of my heroes - that faithful martyr in the city of Smyrna
- 1). They tried again and again to get him to turn from his faith – to renounce Jesus
 - 2). The proconsul sentencing him to death wanted to set him free
The proconsul urged: "reproach Christ, and I will set you free."
Polycarp responded: "86 years have I have served him," Polycarp declared, "and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"
 - 3). They finally put him at the stake to burn him alive
Here are his words as the fire was being prepared: "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of you, the God of angels, powers and every creature, and of all the righteous who live before you, I give you

thanks that you count me worthy to be numbered among your martyrs, sharing the cup of Christ
and the resurrection to eternal life...

- a). He refused to recant – accepting the flames because those flames were momentary
They were simply the way God had chosen to bring him home

Point: Godly Polycarp is a Christian hero – an incredible example - UNLESS there is no resurrection

- A. If there was no resurrection he was just an old fool – who gave his life for nothing – dying for a lie

Transition: What is worse he died believing he was forgiven by God because of Christ's work

- A. Only to discover He was still lost – still guilty – still on his way to hell – next point

If Christ didn't rise from the dead our bibles are worthless

If Christ didn't rise from the dead we have no hope beyond the grave – even for the believer

Third: We Have No Release from Our Guilt Before God

1. No resurrection = no forgiveness of sins

- A. No removal of our guilt – no payment that satisfied God's justice
B. Sin must be judged and if Christ wasn't able to meet the holy demands of God in our place
1). And if He didn't raise out of that grave – that is proof He didn't (see in a minute)
2). If our sin wasn't judged on Christ then it must be judged on us
C. Listen to Paul's words in regard to our faith if Christ hasn't risen - tragic

1 Cor 15:17-18 (NLT) And if Christ has not been raised, then *your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins.* (18) In that case, *all who have died believing in Christ have perished!* (including those great men like Polycarp)

Point: If there is no resurrection Christianity crumbles into nothing but a lie foisted upon naïve people

- A. The work of Christ on the cross was not sufficient – and we are all still lost

Summary: The resurrection really matters – if there is no resurrection that changes everything

- A. Christianity becomes nothing more than a cruel joke! - The greatest deception ever foisted upon man
B. Our Bible is nothing more than a book filled with lies - story of a deceiver who wasn't who He said He was
C. We look into a future with no hope of glory only the certainty of hell
1). Only the fearful looking ahead to standing before a holy God still guilty of sin

Transition: But what if Jesus did rise from the dead like the Bible says He did

- A. What if death was conquered on that first Easter morning – Then what does that mean?

III. WHAT IF JESUS DID RISE FROM THE DEAD

If this is true it changes everything

First: It Means that Jesus is Still Alive

1. He is alive and available to everyone who lives on earth this morning

- A. This incredible man who captivated the people of His day
1). Whose presence changed those He was around
2). Whose teachings transformed people at the very core of their beings
3). Whose compassion & tenderness lovingly reached out to the hurting
4). This one who brought hope to the helpless, help to the hopeless and new dreams to those in despair
5). This incredible being who brought freedom to those bound by their own sin and guilt
6). This man who offered mankind the hope and anticipation of a wonderful future

Point: If Jesus rose from the dead – He is still available to do the same things for us today

It Means that Jesus is Still Alive

Second: It Means that His Promises Are Still Valid

1. His promises are connected to Him – if He is alive they are still active

- A. These promises are so glorious – and they are for you through Him

SUCH AS: Mat 11:28 (NLT) Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

John 8:12 (NLT) Jesus said to the people, “I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.”

Jn 10:9 (ESV) I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Jn 14:27 (ESV) Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Jn 16:33 (ESV) I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

- 1). To the weary He promises rest to all who come to Him
- 2). To those with no direction or purpose in life - He promises light, guidance and meaning
- 3). To those crushed under the weight of their guilt He offers salvation
 - a). A complete removal of guilt – so their soul enjoys wonderful rest (Pasture)
- 4). For those who are under the tyranny of anxiety He promises peace
- 5). To those who feel constantly overcome by what this world throws at them
 - a). He offers victory - because He is with us and He has overcome this world!

Point: If Christ didn’t rise out of that grave – all these promises died with Him

- A. But if He is alive every one of these promises are true – are still valid
- B. What about this one!

John 10:10 (NIV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

- 1). I remember when I first met Him – the contentment was overwhelming – *the search was over!*
 - a). I knew I had found what life was all about – rich, satisfying life
- 2). Are you tired of chasing life – trying to find satisfaction in relationships – career - things
 - a). You’ll chase that satisfaction until you die
You were designed by God to need more! To be satisfied by Him!
 - 1a). Nothing else is big enough! It will always let you down
It will leave you restless and unsatisfied
 - b). God has made you to enjoy life through a relationship with Him!
Until that broken link is fixed you’ll end up empty
- C. Because Christ rose from the dead – that changes everything doesn’t it
 - 1). Because He’s alive in my life there is a lasting satisfaction that just keeps getting better - deeper
 - 2). If He hadn’t rose from the dead I’d still be searching
 - a). But I’ve found what I always wanted – I just didn’t know it was all in Him!

If the resurrection is true: It means that Jesus is still alive

It means that all those glorious promises are still valid

Third: It Means that the Grave is Not the End of the Road

1. It means that death doesn’t have the last word

- A. That final enemy of man that sent them hurtling into eternity without God has been defeated

1 Cor 15:55-57 (NLT) O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (56) For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. (57) *How we thank God, who gives us victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

- 1). Sin has a sting! Men are conscious of their sinfulness before a holy God (God put that there)
 - a). This is what makes man afraid to die! Deep down they know they're in trouble.
 - b). They will be condemned by the law of God – they are guilty and must be punished
- 2). But through the work of Christ the power of sin, death and hell have been broken
 - a). Therefore the grave has become the believer's servant NOT their enemy
 - b). Why Paul can say when weighing out life continuing on earth or death

Php 1:23 (ESV) ...My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Point: This is our hope isn't it. Christ is alive! Therefore we will live too!

- A. Death cannot defeat us. The grave will not have the final word!

Jn 14:2-3 (ESV) In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ⁽³⁾ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

- 1). He rose – He's gone to prepare a place for us! He is going to take us to be with Him!
- 2). The grave takes the unbeliever into judgment – and the believer into glory

If the resurrection is true: It means that Jesus is still alive

It means that all those glorious promises are still valid

It means that the grave is not the end of the road – one more

FOURTH: It Means that We KNOW All of Our Sins Have Been Paid for

1. The resurrection proves that God did accept Jesus sacrifice – how?

- A. When He went to the cross my sins became His – imputation
He took responsibility to pay for them by His death on the cross
- B. What proves that God was satisfied with His sacrifice? That 100% of my sin was paid for
- 1). It was the resurrection. That He rose out of that grave to glory – at the right hand of the Father
 - 2). If He paid for every one of my sins that was placed into my account but one – 99%
That one sin left would demand God's holy justice and would have kept Him out of heaven

But we know He rose: Eph 1:19-20 (ESV) (Paul prays we may understand) what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ⁽²⁰⁾ that he worked in Christ *when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,*

Point: The resurrection is your receipt from God regarding your sin – stamped "Paid in full"

That doesn't happen if every one of our sins was not paid for

- A. But good news Christians – Jesus rose – your record is clean – God has nothing against you

Transition: We're running out of time so let's close this up

THE CALL

1. Easter teaches us truth that demands a decision

- A. What am I going to do with this risen Jesus Christ? Who is alive today? Lord of all

2. If you choose to follow the Risen Lord and His ways

- A. If you'll go to Jesus seeking mercy and the forgiveness of your sins
Embracing Him as the only hope of salvation
- B. Then all those promises become yours

- 1). The promise of escape from divine judgment – He bore your judgment for you
- 2). The promise of eternal life with Him in heaven – He has gone to prepare a place for you
- 3). The promise of fullness of life here – life with life in it – satisfying because He's in it
 - a). Because my Savior lives so do I – not only after I die but now!

3. This morning we've all chosen one side or the other

- A. Or you can reject Him as if the resurrection didn't matter at all
 - 1). Your problem is – He's not going to go away – He is alive – He rose!
Therefore we are all heading towards a meeting with Him!
 - 2). For the Christian that meeting is going to be glorious
 - a). For those who have not embraced Christ by faith it will be horrifying

Point: God in His great love, grace and mercy is reaching out to you right now

- A. He wants to change your eternity – bring you into His family – He wants you to experience His love
Giving you a great hope for the future
- B. The truth is the grave couldn't hold Him
 - 1). Now the only question is: "What are you going to do about Him?"
 - a). How you answer that question will determine your eternity!!! Choose wisely!!!