

RESURRECTION SUNDAY 2018

Hymns: #157 Jesus Christ Is Risen Today

#164 Thine Be the Glory

Readings: Psalm 16 / Luke 24:1-12 / 1 Cor. 15:12-58

In the minds of most of us western Christians, Easter Sunday and the Resurrection often take a back seat to other holidays or theologically significant events in the life of Jesus. For example, Christmas is a much more “popular” Holy day than is Easter. Similarly the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ upon the Cross takes precedence for most over the meaning of His Resurrection. And yet, without the Resurrection both His Birth and His Death are no more significant than any other birth or death. They fail to achieve their end without the Resurrection. Importantly, they fail to reach us if there is no Resurrection.

This morning I want us to be reminded of three aspects, past, present and future, of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and what it means to us. In the past aspect we see the Vindication of the Son and the Verification of the Father. In the present aspect, how the Resurrection frees us from our fear of death. And in the future aspect, how His resurrection is the guarantee of our own resurrection.

I. Vindication of the Son/ Verification of the Father.

When we look at the Resurrection from the past tense aspect we see the vindication of the Son and the Verification of the Father. The fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead is vindicating proof that the Son lived a sinless life of dependence and verifies the Father’s approval that the curse of death incurred by the Fall of Adam has been fully born and overcome for us by Jesus Christ.

When God explained to Adam and Eve in the Garden that they would die if they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and evil, He was not so much erecting a legal/penal framework as He was declaring the state of reality. In other words, if Adam and Eve sought to live independent of Him they would die. That’s just reality. It’s the way the universe is wired. For example, if a fish tries to live independent of water, it will die. Not as a penalty, but because it was not created to live outside the environment of water. Or take for example what happens if you jump out of an airplane, independent of a parachute; you will die. Yes, you have broken a law, but would your death be a penalty? Would your violation of the law result in you being judged, sentenced and executed in a “jurisprudence” penal framework? Would not your death rather be the result of having violated a basic Law of the universe...the Law of Gravity?

God warned Adam and Eve that they would die, not that he would kill them. This is very important, for the notion that the atoning death of Jesus Christ was to appease an “angry God whose honour had been violated” (Anselm of Canterbury) or that His death meant to fall “into the hands of an angry God’s execution” (Jonathan Edwards) or to come under the disinterested sentencing of a judge who was simply reading the “penal code for breaking the law” (Calvin); all these views fall far short of describing the work of Christ at the Cross and are concepts far too common in our Western Legal Christian minds.

Internalizing the Fruit of Knowing Good and Evil, was and is, simply not something we were created to know independently and away from our relationship with God. Adam and Eve chose to know this by themselves and as a result died a death that has come to all of us born in the “first man Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) ever since. Adam’s death and ours is the result of our independence.

Our death was “independence”.

However, Jesus’ death was “in dependence”.

Jesus Christ, the “last Adam” and the “second man” (1 Cor.15:45-47) lived His life fully dependent upon his Father. From the temptation to provide bread for Himself in the wilderness all the way to The Cross, Jesus did and said nothing independently of His Father. Jesus said, “When you have lifted

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up the Son of Man (i.e. crucified Him), then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that **I do nothing on my own** but speak just what the Father has taught me" (John 8:28).

His death "in dependence", after a lifetime of being tempted in every way just as you and I are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15), is His great victory over death for us. "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15: 56). "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21) and He went to the Cross having lived a Law fulfilling sinless life. His resurrection from the dead is the proof and the Vindication of the Son's perfect life and sacrifice. Acts 2:24 tells us "...it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" and Rom. 6:9 tells us "...death no longer has mastery over him". Why? Because His death was sinless and in dependence, unlike Adam who was a sinner and independent. The Resurrection is the proof.

If we must speak of the Cross and the Resurrection in legal juridical terms then we must say that Jesus Christ is the "Judge that was judged in our place" (Karl Barth). He bore the reality of the death incurred by Adam, a death that has come to all of us and one that we could not bear.

Jesus, as our Vicarious Man and Savior, stood in our place and bore the consequences of our having violated the moral fabric of God's universe. God is not an angry judge but a Propitious Father, reaching forward to seek and save that which is lost, for that is what it means to be propitious. God is propitious even in the face of Adam's fall. The death of Jesus is a propitiating death; a death that fully absorbs God's righteous decree of death for sin while maintaining the moral fabric of God's character and universe when He then decrees sinners forgiven and imputes to them His own righteousness. Jesus' death absorbs the "deep magic" which the Witch of Narnia invoked before Aslan regarding Edmunds sin in C.S. Lewis' "The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe". Jesus is God in the flesh, dying for us in propitiating love.

Now God the Father "commands all people everywhere to repent. (i.e. change your minds and believe what Jesus' death and resurrection has accomplished for you). For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has **given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.**" (Acts 17: 31)

Thus, The Resurrection is also the Father's verification that not only was "the Judge judged" to take away sin and death, but that He has also been appointed to reign in righteousness and judge the world with Justice in His future Millennial Kingdom.

II. Frees Us from the Fear of Death

The present tense aspect of the Resurrection frees us from the fear of death. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is also the proof that death and Satan have lost their hold on us too for they have been defeated.

(2 Tim. 1:9-10) "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has **destroyed death** and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

(Heb. 2:14-15) "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might **destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--** and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death".

It was this "fear of death" that drove me to pick up a stolen Gideon's Bible 32 years ago and through which I heard the gospel for the first time. "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved" is my story.

What comfort we can know as we read from the scriptures verses like:

2 Cor. 5:14 "we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died."

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Col. 3:3-4 “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Rom. 8: 11 “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

Are you convinced? Do you know that you have already died? Do you know the Life giving Spirit within you?

Fear of death is slavery and an unnecessary slavery at that. God’s own testimony to us is that our death has already happened in Christ’s death, and that His death **destroyed death** and the **devil**. His Resurrection is the proof and the confidence that we need no longer be slaves to the fear of death.

The devil will continue to lie to us that this is not the case. If he can get us to doubt God’s word and testimony, as he successfully did to Adam and Eve, then we will remain in slavery to him through our fear of death. Unbelief at this point is no little matter either in our relationship with God or in our experience of life. As Brennan Manning so plainly puts it in his chapter ‘Present Resurrections’, “God raised Jesus. This is the apostolic witness, the heart of the apostolic preaching: either you believe in the resurrection and you believe in Jesus of Nazareth, or you don’t believe in the resurrection and you don’t believe in Jesus of Nazareth” (Brennan Manning, *Abba’s Child* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1994) p.100)

Fear is useless. Let us doubt our doubts and side with God against our enemy’s fearful forebodings. Let us allow ourselves to be loved and remember that “there is no fear in love, for perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:18-19) Let us trust that in our being set free from slavery to the fear of death, that we may also increasingly be set free even from our fear of dying, and sing with confidence:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55)

III. His Resurrection is the Guarantee of Our Own Resurrection/ Rapture

The future aspect of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the guarantee of our own future resurrection. Listen to how Paul makes this clear connection between the resurrection of Jesus and our own:

“For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost...But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead the firstfruits 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.” (1 Cor. 15:16-22)

The point is crystal clear, **we cannot have one without the other**. If Christ was raised from the dead, then you and I will be too. Guaranteed!

The only exception to the guarantee of our being resurrected is if we are fortunate enough to be part of the generation of believers who will be alive at the time of the Rapture, when Jesus returns to snatch away his called out ones, that is, His Church.

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep (i.e. experience death of our bodies), but we will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” (1 Cor. 15:51-53)

“According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call

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of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." (1 Thes. 4:15-18)

Paul called these comforting words our "blessed hope"... that is "the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." (Titus 2:13-14)

The Resurrection of Jesus is our own guarantee of either resurrection or rapture. This Easter Sunday morning should remind us that we have a glorious hope and future beyond this world. Let us also take serious stock of where we have placed our hope and remember the Apostle Paul's words: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." (1 Cor. 15:19)

So in light of the Vindication of the Son and the Verification of the Father; in light of our freedom from the fear of death; in light of a guaranteed Resurrection or Rapture...what are we to do in response?

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Cor. 15:58)

1) Stand Firm

Whether you know it or not, whether you like it or not, you and I are involved in a cosmic battle with spiritual forces far beyond our strength. We are a "Band of Brothers at Bastogne" far, far behind enemy lines. It is from this perspective that Paul tells us to stand firm.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your **stand** against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to **stand** your ground, and after you have done everything, to **stand**. **Stand** firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should." (Eph. 6:10-20)

To stand firm in the Resurrection, we need to take our warfare seriously and get dressed daily in the six pieces of God given armour- Jesus Christ Himself. Wearing one's helmet while dug in at Bastogne in December 1944 was not an optional requirement for survival.

2) Let Nothing Move You

How do we let nothing move us? "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet **it did not fall**, because it had its foundation on the rock." (Matt. 7:24) To let nothing move us we must be grounded in Jesus Christ and put into practice the Word of God, for it is not a case of if the storms of life will blow against our house, but when. Only one kind of house will remain standing and unmoved. We must be doers, not just hearers.

3) Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain

How do we know our labor in the Lord is not in vain?

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First because “God is not unjust; **he will not forget your work** and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.” (Heb. 6:10)

Second because Jesus has told us, “Behold, I am coming soon! **My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone** according to what he has done.” (Rev. 22:12)

Receiving the reward of sharing in the Millennial Reign of our coming King is no little reward. Likewise, one thousand years is a long time to be told to go “stand in the corner” if we insist on squandering our time, talents and God given gifts.

May this Easter morning prove to us that Jesus, the exact same Jesus we read of in the pages of the Bible, is actually and truly alive this very day. He died your death and mine and is coming for us soon. May the Vindication of the Son and Verification of The Father; the freedom from fear of death and the guarantee of our own future resurrection inspire us to go forward today with joy as we stand firm, letting nothing move us and look forward our blessed hope and reward.

The Lord Be with you. He is risen. He is risen indeed!