

# ***“Easter: Why it Matters”***

## Selected Texts

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 01)** The resurrection of Jesus is at the core of the Christian message. It is the core of the core. For as Paul writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 02)** **If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Cor 15:14).**
  - So, one way to approach Easter is to talk about the evidence that shows Jesus was truly raised from the dead. That’s what we did last Easter.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 03)** But this year I want to do something different. This year I want to ask, **“So what?”** Even if such an incredible event actually happened, what difference does that make to us who live in Victoria 2000 years later?
  - It’s a good question if you’re just looking into Christianity, but it is also a good question if you’ve been a Christian for a long time. Every Christian believes the resurrection is important but we’re not always sure why.
    - Have you ever noticed that Christians talk more about Jesus’ death than about his resurrection? We have endless books, sermons, and songs about the cross. But in comparison there are very few books, sermons, and songs on the resurrection. And yet, if you read the book of Acts you will discover that the sermons, prayers, and speeches of the early Christians were dominated by the resurrection.
- For instance, on the day of Pentecost Peter preached a sermon and said, **(SHOW SLIDE 04)** **God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. . . This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. . . (Acts 2:24, 32)**
  - In Acts 10 Peter is speaking in another town and says, **(SHOW SLIDE 05)** **They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day (Acts 10:39-40)**
    - In Acts 17 Paul is preaching in Athens and he says, **(SHOW SLIDE 06)** **[God] commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.**
- So, the resurrection of Jesus is at the core of Christianity. **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 07)** The early Christians not only believed it happened but that it had profound meaning. This morning we are asking, **“What does the resurrection of Jesus mean?”**
  - To do this I want to look at four different passages of scripture in order that we might see four answers to what Jesus’ resurrection means.
    - I hope to show you that there is nothing in the entire universe that is more practical to your life than the resurrection of Jesus.

## WE CAN BE MADE RIGHT WITH GOD

- So, what does the resurrection of Jesus mean? **(SHOW SLIDE 08)** **First, the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead means we can be made right with God.**
  - In Romans 4:24-25 Paul refers to: **(SHOW SLIDE 09)** **Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**
- This word “justification” comes from the courtroom. God is the judge. We are the criminals who have broken God’s good laws. We are charged with a long list of sins – we have not loved our Creator and we have not loved other people as we ought.
  - The verdict has been read: we are all guilty as charged. The sentence has been passed: we are all condemned to face the judgment of death and hell.
- But the story of the Bible is that God the judge has found a way to let guilty criminals go free. How can that be? If a judge just let a criminal go, we would call for the judge to be impeached. That is not just. So how can God do this?
  - Paul says it is through the death *and* resurrection of Jesus.
- First, his death. As Paul says, **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** **Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**
  - Notice it was for our trespasses that he died. So he did not die to face judgement for his own sins, for he did not sin. He died in our place to take the punishment that we deserve.
- But notice very carefully that it is not just the cross that saves us. It’s also his resurrection. **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** **Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**
  - To be justified means you are in right standing with the judge. There are no charges against you. You are not condemned but are free. How can you know for sure that God the judge has received Jesus’ death as payment for your sins?
    - Because God raised him from the dead. In raising him God was saying, ***“This is my proof that the debt you owe has been paid off. Your crimes have been punished. Justice has been served. Anyone who comes to Christ can be justified.”***
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 12)** Think of Jesus’ resurrection like God’s receipt to us that Jesus’ death paid for all our sins. A few years ago, I got a reassessment letter for my taxes from Revenue Canada. It was one of those letters that, although not accusing me of fraud, certainly strikes fear in the heart. Revenue Canada said that I owed them a few thousand dollars because the amount I claimed for my charitable donations did not match my receipts. The letter went on to say that if I did not provide the receipts immediately bad things would happen to me.
  - Now do you think I fell into great fear over this? Do you think I lost sleep over this? That all depends on one thing doesn’t it? Are there receipts that prove I paid each charitable organization in full? If not, I have great reason to fear but if they do exist I can sleep at night.
- Well I knew that I was honest on my taxes, but when I phoned my financial advisor he said he had no record of them and that I should check at home. I tore the house apart but could not find them. Foolishly, I had not made copies that I could quickly pull out. I did start losing sleep. After a few weeks of anxiety my financial advisor called and said

he found them – they had simply been wrongly filed at his office. What a relief! I was so happy.

- With my receipts in hand I was bold. I was free. I could say, ***“Be gone Revenue Canada! I don’t owe you anything!”***
  - A receipt is hard proof that everything is paid in full. That is how Jesus’ resurrection relates to his death. His death is the payment for sin and his resurrection is the receipt, the hard proof that God fully accepts that payment and our sins have been dealt with so that we are justified.
- This is so practical. What do you do when you know you have sinned against God? When your conscience is consuming you and accusing thoughts are telling you that you can’t come near to God after what you have done.
  - You start by agreeing: ***“Oh yes, you are right. I don’t deserve God’s love and favour. I have sinned. But Jesus died for my sins.”*** Yet, in that moment, it just doesn’t feel like you can be forgiven and have God’s full favour. Accusing voices say, ***“Fine but how can you claim to be a follower of Christ when you keep failing him so much. Your actions prove you aren’t right with God.”*** What should you do then? You need to pull out God’s receipt!
    - Shout at the top of your lungs, ***“God raised Jesus from the dead. That is God’s proof that Jesus’ death has made full payment for my sins. That is the proof that I am justified before God. Be gone accusing thoughts. I don’t owe anything because Jesus paid it all!”***
- So that is the first thing Jesus’ resurrection means. It means we can be made right with God. Have you come to God, asking him to forgive you and justify you because of what Jesus has done? If not, do it this very day and you will be justified.

### JESUS HAS UNRIVALLED SUPREMACY

- Second, **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead means he has unrivalled supremacy.
  - Here we go to that famous passage in Philippians 2 that, once again, shows us the connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus.
    - This passage begins by describing the high position Jesus has as God, then plunges downward as he gives up his rights as God to become a man, then goes lower to die, then even lower to die on a cross.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
  - Because Jesus moved from this high position to the lowest of low, we once again discover that God does something for Jesus. What does he do? God raises him to the highest place – to the place of unrivalled supremacy.
    - **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the

earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- So, because of his tremendous humility, his obedience, and his self-sacrificial death, God has exalted him to the highest place. There is no higher position. There is no higher authority. Jesus is the king over all kings. Jesus is the Lord above all lords.
  - And so, all of creation, including you and I, are called to bow the knee to him and declare that Jesus is Lord.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 16)** The early Christians used art to communicate their belief in the unrivaled supremacy of Christ. For instance, wealthy Christians would pay an artist to carve the sarcophagus in which their bodies would be placed when they died.
  - Under the city of Rome there are 17kms of underground caves where many Christians were buried.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 17)** Here is one sarcophagus from 350AD. If you're listening to this on our podcast look up an image of the "Sarcophagus of Domatilla." Let me explain the carvings because it is all meant to communicate the unrivaled supremacy of Christ.
  - Notice that there are five panels along the side of the coffin, like five parts of a comic strip with each one communicating something different.
    - The two on the right are carvings of Jesus before Pilate
    - The two on the left are of carvings of Jesus being tortured and Simon helping him carry the cross with the crown of thorns pressed into his head.
- But it is the centre panel that is main point. It combines the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus into one panel. **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** Let's zoom in on it. Let me explain it by working from the bottom to the top.
  - First there is a cross with a stone tomb behind it.
  - Second, notice the cross is empty. Jesus is not hanging on it anymore.
  - Third, there are two Roman soldiers below. One sleeping by the tomb and the other looking up as he ponders what is above on the panel.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 19)** Fourth, there are two doves sitting on the crossbeam. Doves represent resurrection. They are looking up toward the symbol on the top of the empty cross – the symbol that dominates the panel and is at its centre.
  - What is the symbol? It is what we call a Chi-rho. **(SHOW SLIDE 20)** Chi is a letter in the Greek alphabet that looks like an X. When translated into English, Chi is the letters "ch." **(SHOW SLIDE 21)** "Rho" is the Greek letter that looks like an English P but when translated is the letter "r." So, what you have is a symbol made up for two letters – chi and rho, which in English are C-h-r. Chr is shorthand for a longer word. Take a wild guess what it is. Christ.
- Now it really gets fun. **(SHOW SLIDE 22)** Notice there is a wreath hanging on the cross and around the Chi-Rho symbol for Christ. What is the point of this wreath?
  - You probably have seen this in drawings of the ancient Olympics. A wreath was like a gold medal. It is the symbol of victory and was given to athletes, military commanders, and Emperors. Here it is saying that the Christ who hung on the cross is now victorious over death.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 23)** Then notice there is an eagle at the top with its wings spreading over the whole panel. In Roman times the eagle was used of the god Jupiter who gives victory, but here it is attributed to Christ.
  - And then finally notice that the eagles wings are stretched out wide and at their tips are two faces. **(SHOW SLIDE 24)** They are the faces of Sol and Luna – the sun and the moon. Romans would use them to emphasize that the Roman rule extended wherever the sun rises and the moon shines.
- Now put all this together. The maker of this sarcophagus is making a powerful statement using the symbols of his day. He is saying Jesus is God’s promised Messiah, the Christ, who would come to save his people.
  - A crown of thorns was mockingly pressed onto his head, but God raised him from the dead and gave him a new crown – the wreath of victory.
  - Jesus was abused and killed by the authorities of his day, but God has raised him from the dead and has given him all authority wherever the sun rises and the moon shines.
    - This Jesus was crucified, but God raised him from the dead and has given unrivaled supremacy. All people, including you and I, are to bow before him, worship him, and serve him as the Lord over all creation.

#### DAILY WORK HAS NEW MEANING

- Third, **(SHOW SLIDE 25)** the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead means our daily work has new meaning.
  - On Good Friday we emphasize Christ’s resurrection by saying, “It’s Friday, but Sunday’s a comin’.” That’s true! But it’s just as true to say, “It’s Sunday, but Monday’s a comin’.” We may sing on Sunday, but work starts on Monday. We may pray on Sunday, but there’s tasks to be done the rest of the week.
    - Most Christians would die for their belief in Jesus’ resurrection, but really aren’t sure how the resurrection of Jesus makes a difference from Monday to Saturday – in the nitty gritty relationships and work of real life.
- In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul talks for an entire chapter about Jesus’ resurrection and how God will raise all his people from the dead. After 57 verses of this he concludes with these words: **(SHOW SLIDE 26)** **Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**
  - The work of the Lord is anything, no matter how small, that fulfills what God has called you to do in this world. And he says nothing you do is in vain if you do it to the Lord. Within the context of 1 Corinthians 15 this is because in some way what we do in this life will last into eternity.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 27)** N.T. Wright says, ***“You are – strange though it may seem . . . accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God’s new world. Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; (SHOW SLIDE 28) every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or walk; every act of care and***

*nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings and for that matter one's fellow nonhuman creatures; (SHOW SLIDE 29) and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world – all this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make.”<sup>1</sup>*

- (SHOW TITLE SLIDE 30) Oh, what meaning this gives to our lives! Your life matters. What you do matters. It's all part of this new life that the risen Jesus gives – a life that will last into eternity.

## WE CAN MOCK DEATH

- Let's turn to one last thing that Jesus' resurrection means. In the final place, (SHOW SLIDE 31) **the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead means we have hope in the face of death.**
  - Near the end of 1 Corinthians 15 Paul does something that is quite incredible. He taunts death. He looks death in the eye and he mocks it. Look at verse 55. (SHOW SLIDE 32) **O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?**
    - He's heckling death. He's ridiculing it. Where does Paul get such supreme confidence in the face of our greatest enemy? Is he naïve? Is he just talking big?
- No, his hope, and our hope, is based on some rock-solid logic and rock-solid facts. It's really simple: (SHOW SLIDE 33) **Since God raised Jesus from the dead, he can—and he will!—raise all those who belong to Jesus from the dead.**
  - Paul says Jesus' resurrection is like the very first fruit in the harvest. The first fruit is a foretaste of the giant harvest that is to come.
    - In the same way, right now death is our great enemy. Just as death killed Jesus, it will kill us. But just as God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him an immortal body, so God will raise all his people from the dead and give them immortal bodies. Paul writes,
      - (SHOW SLIDE 34) **Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.**
- (SHOW TITLE SLIDE 35) And so we can have hope in the face of our greatest enemy. Oh yes, death you may kill us. Oh yes, death you may take our loved ones from us – and Central, we have lost a lot of our Christian brothers and sisters. Since last Easter we have lost: Darlaine Bagshaw, Norma Webster, Mae Meller, Joyce Danielson, Liz Morgan, Betty Miller, Werner Koch, Eileen Richards, Gordon Duke, Doris Moorhouse, Frida Semrau, Bruce Reimer, Paul Bankonin, Gordon Belbin, Bob McKay, Anson Patterson, and Giles Addey

---

<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 208.

- Death, you have made us grieve for none of us can stand against your power. But death, we have hope amid our grief. A day is coming when the risen Christ will return and on that day he will give us immortal resurrection bodies like his own.
  - On that death, you will never touch us again. We will ridicule you. We will mock you. So, do your worst death, for the risen Christ has beaten you and a day is soon coming when he will utterly destroy you!
- Dr. W. A. Criswell, the late pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, tells how he sat next to a well-known theologian on an airplane. The man told Dr. Criswell about how he had recently lost his young son.
  - The theologian said he had come home from school with a fever and they thought it was just one of those childhood things. But it was a very powerful form of meningitis. The doctor said they could not save his little boy and that he would die.
- And so this seminary professor, loving his son as he did, sat by the bedside. It was the middle of the day and the little boy's strength was going from him. His vision and brain were getting clouded. He said, ***"Daddy, it's getting dark isn't it?"*** The professor said to his son, ***"Yes son. It is getting dark, very dark."*** He said, ***"Daddy, I guess it's time for me to go to sleep, isn't it?"*** He said, ***"Yes, son, it's time for you to go to sleep."***
  - The professor said the little boy had a way of fixing his pillow just so, and putting his head on his hands when he slept. The boy fixed his pillow and laid his head on his hands and said, ***"Good night Daddy. I will see you in the morning."*** He then closed his eyes in death.
    - Dr. Criswell said the professor didn't say anything else after that. He just looked out the window of that airplane for a long time. Then he turned back and he looked at Dr. Criswell with tears streaming down his cheeks. And he said, ***"Dr. Criswell, I can hardly wait for the morning."***
- Since Jesus rose from the dead, the long dark night of grief will one day end. Since Jesus rose from the dead, morning is coming. A day will soon come when the risen Christ will return and he will resurrect all his people to unite them together with him forever.
  - Resurrection bodies. We will mock death. We will laugh at death. We will kick dust in death's face.
    - This is the meaning of the resurrection.