

## Slide 1

### The Importance of the Resurrection

He is risen! It became a standard greeting for the early church. But can you imagine the first few times that it was spoken?

Last week, you may recall we spoke about the dark atmosphere of disillusionment and disappointment that pervaded the lives of many who had been following Jesus.

Even the closest of his disciples had fled into the darkness as the trial of Jesus was underway. Afraid, embarrassed, disillusioned, and disappointed just some of the emotions that dominated their minds.

But now three little words dispelled disillusionment and disappointment and replaced fear with boldness!

My how the world had changed in just a few hours!

The religious authorities thought they had solved their problem and now were once again at the pinnacle of religious attention.

But these three little words circulating through the street meant that they would not be rid of him as they had wished.

The Roman soldiers thought they had taken his life permanently, the soldiers, the grave and the huge stone covering its opening, could not hold him!

He is risen.

Three little words that changed everything for them and three little words that changed everything for us.

The importance of these three days in history, these three days of the cross and the resurrection, and these three little words 'he is risen' cannot be overstated.

Without the cross, the sacrifice of our Lord and the shedding of his blood on our behalf would leave us with our sin problem unresolved. Leave us on the path to a terrible eternity.

Without the resurrection of our Lord, we would have no hope of our own resurrection.

The cross and the resurrection are the kingpins of our Christian faith. Without the cross and the resurrection our Christian Faith falls apart.

It is no wonder then that from the moment these three little words, ‘he is risen’ were uttered to this very day, the skeptics and critics have tried to undermine the truth about the resurrection.

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For our first scripture reading today we go to Matthew Chapter twenty-eight beginning at verse one (NLT)

*Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow.*

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*The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. Then the angel spoke to the women. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying.*

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*And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you.” The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel’s message.*

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*And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.” As the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened.*

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*A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe. They told the soldiers, “You must say, ‘Jesus’ disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body.’ If the governor hears about it, we’ll stand up for you so you won’t get in trouble.”*

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*So, the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today*

And so the great cover up begins. Cover ups tend to progressively involve more and more people.

First the guards who had been sent to secure the tomb. It is no wonder that they were afraid. Failure to perform their duties satisfactorily usually resulted in their death.

And then the religious authorities. Remember how jealous they had been of Jesus' ministry? They thought they were rid of him, but here are the guards saying he is risen and all this wild talk about an angel.

And so, they became co-conspirators in a vain attempt to hide the truth.

And they also became the first among many skeptics right us to the present day who try to present an argument that Jesus did not rise from the grave.

Some suggest the swoon theory. That Jesus did not die but fell into a deep coma later to be revived in the coolness of the tomb.

I think it can be successfully argued that this theory is more difficult to believe than a resurrection.

First, one has to believe that Jesus survived a Roman crucifixion.

Secondly, you have to believe that the guard who was asked to break the legs of the victims made a mistake when he concluded Jesus was already dead but speared him anyway just to make sure.

Thirdly, you would have to believe that those who handled his body, taking it from the cross transporting it to the grave and wrapping it with the customary grave clothes would have somehow not noticed that there was warmth in the body and other signs of life.

But the strongest evidence for the resurrection is the collective testimony of many, many witnesses.

First, the women at the tomb, the guards, then the disciples, and then over five hundred people that Paul would mention in one of his letters.

Witnesses who were still alive and could be tested as to the veracity of their testimonies.

So, these three words ‘he is risen’ spoken through the lips of many witnesses spread to countless others and continue to spread today.

The Bible speaks considerably about resurrection as fact and a fulfilment of prophecy.

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Going way back to the book of Job. We see Job making this proclamation in Job Chapter nineteen beginning at verse twenty-five (NIV).

It is an amazing prophecy written several centuries before the cross. Job says:

*I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

These verses prophetically point to end times when the Lord shall return, and the dead shall be raised.

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And it is because Jesus was resurrected that we have hope and assurance in our own coming resurrection. Paul underlines this point in I Thessalonians chapter four verses thirteen to eighteen. (NLT)

*Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*

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*According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until 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 of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

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*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 one another with these words.*



So, you see here how the resurrection of our Lord sets the stage for our resurrection, for an amazing resurrection of saints from all over the world who have passed on year by year.

What an amazing time that will be. I wonder how big a line up there will be to check in with old Job and here him testify to the goodness of God in spite of all the hardships he endured.

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In I Corinthians Chapter Fifteen verse twenty (NIV) Paul proclaims:

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

This word picture of first fruits is literary genius. The first fruit of the season is something we enjoy. The first ripe tomato, the first nature carrot from the garden with the sweetness never quite found in the store bought variety.

But the exciting thing is that the first fruit brings with it the hope, the expectation and the anticipation of an abundant harvest,

The first fruit resurrection of Jesus brought with it the glorious hope and expectation of millions of resurrections that will happen co-incident with the Lord's return.

So, the first reason that the resurrection is critical to our faith is that it established the glorious hope of our own resurrection.

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The second reason that the resurrection is critical to our faith as Christians is that without it the integrity and honesty of our saviour fails.

Returning to the words of the angel from our opening text we read:

*I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen.*

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And then from our Lord's own words found in Mark 8:31(NIV)

*He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again*

So, if the resurrection of Jesus did not happen then Jesus' own claims were not true.

No wonder the skeptics try so hard to challenge the resurrection account. They know full well our saviour's credibility hangs on the resurrection.

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The third reason the resurrection is critical to our Christian faith is found in I Corinthians 15:14 (ESV) Paul writes there:

*And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.*

The resurrection of Jesus is presented as fact throughout the New Testament writings. It has been presented as fact by Christian scholars, teachers, and preachers down through the ages.

If the resurrection is not a fact then it is not just Paul who would be guilty of misrepresenting God but each one of us who have shared the resurrection as truth to the world around.

Without the resurrection there really is no New Testament message to preach.

The fourth reason the resurrection is critical is because without it our faith and indeed our life becomes futile.

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Let's look at I Corinthians 15:18 (ESV)

*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*

Paul makes an interesting statement that is without the resurrection you are still in your sins.

But you might well ask 'wasn't our sin addressed through God's punishment in our behalf at the cross?' Didn't the shedding of his blood ensure that the penalty was paid? So how does the resurrection become critical to our sin problem?

Remember our study on the Passover.  
Remember the Passover lamb had to be without blemish pointing forward to the need for our sacrifice to be without blemish, without sin?

If Jesus did not rise from the dead then his prophecy and teaching given to his disciples was false and he would not have been the sinless spotless lamb of God making his sacrificial death incapable of dealing with our problem.

As Paul writes we would still be in our sin.

So, three days in history, and the three little words 'he is risen' spoken on the third day are history changing and potentially life changing for those who accept the resurrection as true.

So where does that leave us on this Easter Sunday in 2022?

We stand today and proclaim the resurrection as truth,

We stand today believing that the grave was found to be empty.

We stand today encouraged that despite the countless attempts to find a conspiracy that would disprove the empty tomb none has been successful.

We stand today encouraged that despite attempts to do so the body was never found, nor skeleton or pieces of bone that can be attributed to Jesus.

We stand today in glorious hope that his was only the first resurrection and ours is yet to come.

We stand today in appreciation that he is not only risen, but that he continues to live and will live forever making intercession for us before the throne of God.

We stand today in appreciation that he lives and walks among us by his spirit continuing to minister in many ways some seen, many unseen.

He is risen, he is risen indeed.