

Easter Ministry April 2023
Central Baptist - Victoria
Easter Sunday – April 9

A HYMN FOR THE RESURRECTION

By Tom Cowan

(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 01 as Tom walks up) Churches may help couples and families with messages on marriage – or how to raise a family – or give help with finances – But as important as these topics are – they are not the crux of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is a resurrection faith – its central message must be about the resurrection. There is life after death – there is a world to come – Christian hope is not to be confused with the Greek concept of the immortality of the soul – Christian hope is altogether different and it involves the resurrection of the body.

Some weeks ago in preparation for Easter Sunday I read through the climax of the Gospels – they tell the story about the cross and the resurrection – they record the testimony of those who witnessed the risen Jesus – disciples – the testimony of women – the 2 on the road to Emmaus – Thomas who had trouble believing – I understand his struggle – I also needed intellectual integrity to come to faith – We possess 4 outstanding documents in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – written within a few decades of the resurrection – and each of these documents claim directly or indirectly an eyewitness account of the events they record.

So we should never be ashamed or hesitant about the basis of our faith as Christians.

There is a short passage in the New Testament – actually only about 6 verses – which covers the entire life of Jesus – from the time when he existed in heaven with God – to when he became human – to the time of his death – and then is exalted by His Father back to heaven again. Great passage to memorize. It was probably an early hymn – there are several in the New Testament – that would have been sung or probably chanted by the early church in a worship service.

Phil. 2:5-11.

This is the Introduction:

(SHOW SLIDE 02) ⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Then the hymn begins – it has 4 movements –

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(SHOW SLIDE 03) EXALTATION:

⁶Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

(SHOW SLIDE 04) INCARNATION:

⁷rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸And being found in appearance as a man,

(SHOW SLIDE 05) HUMILIATION:

he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

(SHOW SLIDE 06) THEN ONCE AGAIN – EXALTATION:

⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

We need to go back and catch this – between the end of what we call verse 8
(remember no verses in original) - and the beginning of verse 9 – there is a gap of at
least 3 days.

by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!

I have in my mind a picture of the orchestra conductor gets to this point – pauses – the
orchestra is silent – the house lights dim to darkness – there is not a sound – everyone
waits in silence – then slowly he lifts his baton – the lights go up – and the music starts
with a great burst of praise -- **Therefore God exalted him to the highest place –
actually it says God hyper-exalted him... and gave him the name that is above
every name,**

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¹⁰ **that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**
¹¹ **and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

It recalls the prayer of Jesus in John 17 before he went to the cross – he prays – **(SHOW SLIDE 07) “and now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world began.”**

He is praying that after this interval of humanity and humiliation – he will be returned to the glory that he had before his birth.

So there is a space in this hymn between the death on a cross and the exaltation of God. A space – actually a gap of at least 3 days -- something must have taken place there for God to step in and intervene. What might have happened in the darkness?

We need to be careful but there are tiny hints in the Scriptures that tell us what happened so that God would step in with the power of resurrection and then exalt Jesus. I may work you a little hard this morning as you travel with me.

Let me suggest to you that we find at least 4 things that take place in the darkness and the silence of these 3 days – things that have an impact and meaning for our lives today on this Resurrection Sunday and beyond.

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As I often say – these are headings – each one can be expanded and many more can be added -

(SHOW SLIDE 08) The Resurrection declares that Jesus won victory over death.

The Resurrection cry is Christ is risen!

He is risen not just in our hearts - but he has risen from the dead. The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is not only strong – but it is overwhelmingly compelling. Acts 1:3 – Luke wrote – Jesus gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. Convincing = proof beyond doubt.

The resurrection of Jesus is not some incidental part of the Christian faith – it is the very heart of the Christian faith. It is not just to be celebrated on Easter Sunday – every Sunday Christians come together to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We meet on the first day of the week to celebrate God's work and presence in a new creation – Jesus lives and because he lives – we may live too.

To a dying world – dying both physically, morally and also emotionally we can proclaim the good news of new life in Christ. Death no longer has the last word – because Jesus has risen from the dead. H. G. Wells – who declared no Christian belief whatsoever said – “if there is no larger life after death then this life is a huge ugly joke. Man is like a braying ass across the scenes of history” That is a tragedy!

The good news is that Jesus has broken through the wall of death – Jesus has carved a trail through the valley of the shadow of death and through faith we may follow him.

He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man – he has met and fought and beaten the King of Death - and everything is different because he has done so. We need to recall that every time we stand at a graveside – say goodbye to a loved one or a friend.

I struggle when I see obituary notices in the papers – no service by request – in other words – nothing! - or there is a growing interest in reincarnation. I sense that it is people trying to believe in something – anything – because they have rejected the one place there is true hope.

So the message of the resurrection becomes all the more urgent. In our dying and despairing world -- there is a desperate need for the good news of Jesus. It is not only

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good news for the future – it is also good news for the present. The risen Christ offers hope and help for the world here and now. The risen Christ gives power for living – power for overcoming even the most difficult of obstacles –

The risen Christ who conquered death promises to be with his people not just to the end, but to the very end. This is good news indeed for a world that is marked by loneliness, stress and pressure of every kind. You watch the TV news every night – war in Ukraine – riots in France – tornadoes in the US – financial stress for many – police officers being killed in line of duty – teachers and kids being shot in a Christian school -- we ask – when will it end?

The book of Revelation opens with a vision that John has of Jesus risen and ascended – it is not Jesus in the future – but Jesus as he is now – exalted and glorified –

(SHOW SLIDE 09) ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.” ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

I get the sense that Jesus can say that he holds the keys of death and Hades in his hand because he fought and wrestled Satan for them in the tomb – and Jesus won! He got the keys from Satan’s hands and now He holds the keys in his hands.

(SHOW SLIDE 10) The Resurrection declares that Jesus did his work.

Remember on the cross he cried out – It is finished. What was finished – the work he came to do.

Romans 4:25

(SHOW SLIDE 11) He was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification.

The two sides of the cross are death and resurrection.

His death was for our sins – and as that broke through to resurrection – Jesus won our justification. That is a legal term – In the Bible it means being declared not guilty. In his death for our sins – Jesus went to the Father on our behalf – and he pleaded our case – he won for us freedom from the penalty and the power of sin.

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(SHOW SLIDE 12) The Resurrection declares that Jesus brings the outpouring of the Spirit.

In the Old Testament – the Spirit was involved in creation – the Spirit also came to prophets and to kings – he brought the Word of the Lord to them – he gave them the spirit of wisdom. But his coming was intermittent – at times sporadic.

John 16:7 – Jesus says to his disciples as they struggled with the idea that he would soon be leaving them. He saw the sadness on their faces – and so he said --

(SHOW SLIDE 13) ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

Peter expresses this reality in his Pentecost sermon.

Acts 2:33

(SHOW SLIDE 14) Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

This is the coming of the Spirit who will teach – counsel – comfort – and gift the church for ministry. He will bear fruit in our lives as we seek to follow the risen Christ. He will bring the words of Jesus back to us – he will lead us into truth.

The Spirit is now given and not withdrawn. He is not just given to kings and prophets but to every believer.

So as Jesus is exalted to the Father by the Father – the Spirit is the gift that is given to him – and subsequently to us for life and ministry.

(SHOW SLIDE 15) The resurrection declares that Jesus Christ is Lord.

One day in the shallow water of a river Jesus was baptised – and he heard the voice of his Father – This is my beloved son and I am well pleased in him – God says – I find pleasure in what he just did.

What Jesus alone on the cross – he lost sight of his Father's face and perhaps no longer heard his voice. But as death gave way to resurrection – He hears his Father's

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voice again – and it exalts him to a higher place – and a declaration is made – a proclamation is announced -- JESUS CHRIST IS LORD.

This means that Jesus is both Savior and Lord – you cannot have half a Christ.

There are 2 implications of this in the life of the church. First is baptism. Baptism is saying and it is being heard saying – Jesus Christ is #1!

Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord could not be conceived of in the life of the early church without being related to baptism. Baptism was the act of confessing Christ as Lord. Let me suggest to you that separating the time of conversion too far from the act of baptism – or making baptism some added extra at a later date – is unfortunate and dualistic. We confess with our mouth and we also should confess with our bodies in baptism. Confessing Christ as Lord in baptism gives a visible picture of the death and resurrection of Jesus and also the union of the convert with the church.

A personal word of testimony – when I was about 16 or so, I became a Christian in a Baptist church in Glasgow – and it was both taught and understood that this confession – within a few weeks or so – would be followed up by baptism. I still hold that to be true.

If you confess to be a Christian – but have not yet taken the step of baptism – may I encourage you – challenge you -- to think seriously about that. Talk to one of the pastors.

Second implication – Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord means that he is not only Lord on Sundays when we are here at church -- he continues to be Lord in every aspect of life – Monday, Tuesday and so on. Jesus is always #1. Jesus is not only Lord of some spiritual part of us – he is Lord over all of us and every part of us.

So with the word of praise and exaltation from His Father – Jesus is exalted with the title – Jesus Christ is Lord!

STAND/WORSHIP TEAM UP.

So we hear again this word of exaltation from The Father.

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(SHOW SLIDE 16) Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
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in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the
Father.

Closing Song:

Prayer partners.

**Our benediction this resurrection morning is often said at some Anglican
churches:**

Follow me:

**CHRIST HAS DIED.
CHRIST HAS RISEN
CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN.**