

## **“Resurrection Matters”**

*Isaiah 25:6-9; I Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18*

*Easter Sunday, April 1, 2021*

It was, at the time it was spoken, quite honestly, one of the most depressing things I’d ever heard. We were at a funeral of a high school friend’s Dad where I ran into an old friend. Now, I’d met this guy way back in high school. Whip-smart, he won all sorts of scholarships. Right out of college, the guy made a ton of money in the market. It looked like he was going to conquer the world. And then, well, he just kind of stalled. He made enough money to not have to work. So, he spent a number of years globetrotting, basically living for good times and those all-important “experiences” we hear so much about these days.

But at the funeral you could tell. Something had him off. Perhaps the idea of death challenged him or the way he was living, I don’t really know. Regardless, several of us high school friends stood in the sanctuary waiting for the service to begin. We did a little of what old friends always do, reliving the glory days. But then we began to talk about where our lives were in the present.

Most of us had settled down, had families so, we were talking about soccer games and carpools...parent stuff. It was then I heard the words – “Well,” said this friend in response, “the only thing that really matters is your frequent flyer status.”

It was a shocking admission but, I’ve come to believe, a truthful one.

My friend with his money and his free time had chosen to make his frequent flyer status the most significant thing in his life. And I understand, I really do. He’d simply taken what he valued most and spoken it aloud.

And, believe me, I’m not telling you this to run somebody down. No, I recall this story because I think at times, we all get our priorities shaken up and out of whack. Sometimes, every one of us here takes something they shouldn’t and make it matter to their lives far more than it should. We do it with work, with our hobbies, even with our kids’ sports leagues. My friend’s admission merely gave words to the reality that a great many people in these days. That what matters most to them is what they have or what they stand to get.

It makes sense. We live in a culture that tells us in a bunch of different ways that the only thing worth living for is yourself.

But you see, when the only thing that matters in your life is you, then you aren’t really living much of a life to begin with, even if it’s littered with the greatest tech, the nicest home and the most exclusive frequent flyer status.

My friend, God bless him, lives in a bubble. A pleasant one, to be sure, but a bubble nevertheless. While that bubble might be filled with the latest and the greatest, detached from anything else, life simply has one final stop. *Meaninglessness.*

Now, I don’t want to bore you, I really don’t. After all, rule number one of preaching – don’t stink on Easter Sunday. But I feel compelled to share with you I think that this spiral into meaninglessness has a cause. An origination, if you will. It begins whenever Christians silence the Word of God in their lives, either by choice, by distraction or by societally-influenced distrust.

That’s why, like everyone here, I’m so filled with joy this Easter Sunday morning. There is much to celebrate, to be sure. But chiefly among the reasons we rejoice is this – Jesus’ resurrection matters.

As in it means something. And not just to me or you or the people listening online. No, the Resurrection matters in ways we may not always think about or be aware of but, oh, how it matters!

To begin with, because Jesus rose from the dead, we can make three TWO assertions about Him.

The first of these is that JESUS is exactly who HE claimed to be. This first one is important, y’all.

For my senior class trip, we went to New York City. It was such a great time, seeing the shows, seeing the museums, getting our first fake IDs in Times Square. But to the ways of the Big Apple, we were, well, quite naive. When the first guy came up to us offering us \$75 Rolexes he’d “found,” (which we took to mean stolen) we were all quick to open our wallets. It was only later, back in our rooms opening their boxes, that one of us found a small “made in China” sticker on the back. These weren’t Rolexes. We’d gotten conned. They guy sold us a bill of goods that wasn’t remotely true.

Now look, during the course of Jesus' ministry, He'd made a number of statements that were utterly shocking to the people around Him at the time.

**Mark 8:31** – “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

He says it another time in the Gospel of John. Just after He cleanses the Temple of the moneychangers and the merchants. They have a short dialogue towards the end of chapter 2.

**John 2:18-20** – “So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

You see it is in the Resurrection that Jesus proves His claims to be the true Messiah, the real Son of God. In fact, if it were not for Jesus actually emerging from the Tomb that first Easter morning, then what we're doing here this morning is absurd. Paul even articulates this in **I Corinthians 15:13-14** saying, “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”

As I've shared with you before, prior to the real Messiah, several others during the same time period had made the same claim. Alas, every one of them met the same end as Jesus, death by crucifixion. They were all as fake as those Rolexes we'd bought. But Jesus, being the real deal, demonstrates his authenticity by emerging from the Tomb.

Yes, the Resurrection proves that Jesus is exactly who He says He is.

And while some may refute the claim, we Christians make here, the truth revealed in history proves these naysayers wrong. Because you see those first apostles and disciples, the ones who'd seen and broken bread with the Risen Lord, well, they went out and told everyone they could. They were remarkably successful in their evangelism and within just a couple of generations after Jesus' ascension into heaven, the mighty Roman Empire embraced it as their official religion.

And, don't miss this point – many of them died because they would not back away from one assertion that Jesus was raised from death. Now look, you might carry a con right up until the point they're going to kill you. But then, well, hey, you'd backtrack, wouldn't you? But the truth of the Resurrection can be gleaned from the fact that men and women who'd seen the Resurrection for real chose to die, rather than recant their words about it.

Yes, Jesus did exactly what He said He would, and that matters.

*The second of the ways that we can say that the Resurrection matters is that it means that Jesus has the power to do what He said He was going to do.*

I remember years ago reading about a particular guru of Transcendental Meditation who told everyone he could walk on water. That's a big claim, isn't it? Well, if you say something like that, people are going to want to see it. So the man arranges a big event, invites the press. All his followers come as well as a large contingent of curious people. The pool is set up, the audience stands ready to be amazed. The man focuses his attention and places his first foot upon the water and...HE FALLS IN.

Compare that to Babe Ruth. It's game 3 of the World Series in 1932. The storied slugger stands at the plate facing pitcher Charlie Root. Babe steps back and points to the fence indicating he's going to hit a home run. The crowd gasps at his confidence. But you know what? Babe hits the home run, cementing his legendary baseball status.

The point being it's easy to make big claims. Unless their backed up by the power and ability to see them through, then it's just all hot air. Talk, as they say, is cheap.

But as Jesus rises from the grave, He proves that, not only can He say the words, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, He can make it happen.

Yes, the Resurrection matters because it shows that Jesus is who He says He is and can do what He says He's going to do.

So, if Jesus is exactly who He claims to be – the Son of God invested with all power and authority from the Father, man, that's Good News on the order of this kind of celebration we have at Easter. Because Jesus

said a whole lot of things, made us a whole lot of promises. And the Resurrection necessarily demonstrates that we can take His word.

To begin with, if Jesus is who He says HE is and has the power to do what HE says he's going to do, it follows that the Resurrection proves that our sins really ARE forgiven. That's not just wishful thinking or false hope.

All of us have a past. Everyone of us have done things we want to forget. Times when we were dishonest, times where we were unfaithful, times where we ignored someone in deep need. The memory of our failures has the potential to continually dog our steps. To lead us to doing the same things again and again. Our past can sometimes drag down our future as we stayed mired in the belief that nothing good can come from us. After all, if we were really good, we wouldn't have done so-and-so.

Well, if you're struggling with forgiving yourself for the past, REJOICE! The Resurrection proves that Jesus really did take your sins on His body as He hung on that Cross. **I Peter 2:24** puts it this way – “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

*Dying, Jesus freed you of the burdens of your past.*

When that truth really sinks in, awakened by the power of the Holy Spirit, MAN, is your life going to change.

Thanks to being involved with Kairos, a prison ministry, I've gotten to see that knowledge strike home for the very first time in a number of folks. The first time though, I was literally blown away seeing it happen. The man's name was Ryan. He was doing 15 years for a series of armed robberies he'd committed while under the influence of cocaine.

He was quiet early on during the weekend, but as we moved forward, he had lots of questions. Then, as he read some letters we'd arranged for he and all of the participants to receive, he just started crying. I mean, tears gushing down. Ryan stood up and came over to me. I was one of the pastors “On-call” in the room, so to speak. Ryan said, can we go pray. It was there he shared that he'd had an encounter with Christ and that he knew without a shadow of a doubt that through Jesus Christ, he was forgiven.

Man, did his life change after that. He got into the Word, took classes, got a degree and now he stands within months of release. He's looking forward to reuniting with his family and commencing real life for the very first time. He's a changed man because, through the power of Christ's forgiveness, Ryan was finally able to forgive himself. Not only for the crimes, but also for all of the other bad things he'd committed in the past.

And that's not the only reason why the Resurrection matters. Since Jesus was raised from the tomb, we know that we can make it through anything this world, broken by sin, can throw at us.

Friends, we all reach a point of exhaustion. We all have events in our lives conspire to bring us to a point of hopelessness. But because of the Resurrection, we can trust that we are NEVER alone. We're never left to handle the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune without a powerful ally close at hand.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus assures us that we won't be left abandoned. He says, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

Friends, that means that not only is our Lord near us, He's in us. Never further away from us than our very next breath. It means that when life takes a turn for the worse, when a doctor delivers a scary diagnosis or a pink slip arrives unexpectedly or we face the death of a loved one, we do not handle the burdens of this life alone.

In the course of my pastorate, I've seen so many people encounter God's presence just as they felt their lives spiraling towards fear and sadness.

One, in particular, remains clear in my mind. He was an Elder at the first church I served as an installed pastor. Not only that, but this man had also been chairman of the nominating committee that brought me to the church. As a consequence, we'd gotten close. But then, in my fifth year there, Jim developed lung cancer. It was a scary time, and his life was never the same again.

But one time, as we were talking, at the Sport's Page of all places, Jim shared with me something really awesome. He said that once, while he was in the hospital awaiting some kind of test, he was frightened out of

his mind and a feeling of dread surrounded him. It was then Jim said that something truly wonderful happened. Jim said that, all of the sudden, a warm, comforting feeling swept over his body. Jim said that, in an instant, it was like he could FEEL all of the prayers being lifted up for him. Not only that, he knew, with absolute certainty, that Jesus was right beside him. With him as he undertook whatever would come.

It makes sense when we remember **Psalm 34:18-19** – “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”

We still live in a world broken by the power of sin. That means that our lives will intersect with sadness and difficulty. But because Christ is risen, we know that we undertake none of this thing called life alone. We are instead joined by our comforter, our Lord, our friend.

And, finally, the third reason that the Resurrection matters is that we can trust what Jesus says to us about the future. And what He says is amazing.

In the Gospel of John, He tells us that where He is going, we shall follow and be with Him. That he’s preparing a place for us in the Father’s house where there are many rooms (I always prefer the KJV- many mansions.). He tells us that it will be a place of joy and reward. **Matthew 25:31-34** – “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

Because Jesus is raised from the dead, we know that He is who He says He is and can do what He says He can do. Thus, we know that when our days are ended, we die yet again to live. There is an undiscovered country which lies beyond our graves and it is none other than the Kingdom of God, our entry to it made possible by Jesus Christ. And all we have to do is have faith, and that faith, guess what? It’s given to us, it’s not even our own doing.

Not by being perfect. Not by spinning our wheels trying to earn our way into heaven. Not even by simply coming to church. Not, we believe, rather, we KNOW, that heaven awaits because Jesus Christ did for us everything necessary. Dying on the Cross and rising again, our eternal future in the Kingdom of God is wholly, completely and 100% assured.

I met someone who really understood this. She was a 17-year-old Hispanic young woman. I met her along with her mother and brother as I was serving as a chaplain at Atrium Main, years ago. On one of my overnight shifts, I was summoned to the cardiac unit in the middle of the night. There, I was directed to this family. Their husband and father had succumbed to a heart event. At the time, he was undergoing emergency surgery which required a heart and lung machine. That is to say their loved one was hovering between life and death.

Well, in such situations, our training suggested we stay with the family (unless they objected) and provide for their needs. So, I chatted with this young woman quite a bit. Her mother didn’t speak English so not only did we talk, she often translates for me. She was a committed Christian as it would turn out. She attended one of the Charlotte area’s many burgeoning Spanish-speaking churches.

At one point, she excused herself. Several minutes later, she returned carrying Cokes and bags of Doritos for everyone, myself included. Here, during what was sure to be one of the worst times of her life, she’d thought to provide snacks for everyone. I was so touched by her gift a tear came to my eye.

Her father, sadly passed the next day.

I was summoned back to the cardiac unit the following day when it happened. There, I found a family engulfed in the kind of sadness which only arrives when a loved one dies.

We said a prayer. As was my training, after they’d gotten done all they needed to do, I escorted them to the exit of the hospital. Given I spent a great deal of time with this family, I felt close to them. On the way out, I uttered my common goodbye. “God will be with you in this time.”

“I know,” said the young woman. Then she said the last words I’d ever hear her speak as she departed. I’ll likely never see her again but her words remain lodged deep in my heart.

“Christ is Risen,” she said. He is Risen, indeed.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Scripture and Quotes

**John 20:1-18** – “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>1</sup>Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

**Mark 8:31** – “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

**John 2:18-20** – “So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

**I Corinthians 15:13-14** – “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”

**I Peter 2:24** – “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

**John 14:?** – “, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

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