

Sermon for March 31, 2024 – Easter Day

1 Corinthians 15:51-58 EHV

Theme: **Christ's Resurrection Means:**

- 1) Your past is forgiven.
- 2) Your future is made secure.
- 3) Your present has purpose.

⁵¹Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But once this perishable body has put on imperishability, and this mortal body has put on immortality, then what is written will be fulfilled: Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory? ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! ⁵⁸Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

What's so great about Easter? It's terrific that Jesus rose from the dead, but how does that help a lonely teen struggling to find her purpose in this world? How does it help the young man sitting in jail - struggling with immense guilt because he, in a drug-infused rage, hurt his infant son? How does Jesus' resurrection help the woman whose doctors have just told her that she will suffer a slow and agonizing death because of pancreatic cancer? What relevancy does Jesus' resurrection have for today's many problems?

With the Holy Spirit as our guide, let us discover the answer to these questions under the theme: **Christ's Resurrection Means:** 1) Your past is forgiven. 2) Your future is made secure. 3) Your present has purpose.

Part One: Your past has been forgiven.

Why do people die? Our sermon text answers that question by stating: *⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* People die because of sin.ⁱ But, that invites the question: what is sin? Simply put, sin is the act of breaking God's law.ⁱⁱ Therefore, the reason everybody dies is that everybody sins - everybody breaks God's holy law.

Now, someone might say: "But I have never dealt drugs, murdered anyone, or stolen anything. I am a pretty good person - trying to help others whenever possible. So, how can you say I am a sinner and deserve to die?" I say it because God doesn't just command you to be a "pretty good" person. He demands perfection, and just one sin is enough to ruin that perfection.

Let me illustrate what I mean: Imagine trying to secure a boat with an anchor on a long chain. As you throw it in the water, just one link in the chain breaks. Where will your anchor end up? At the bottom of the lake! Why? Because just one broken link ruins the whole chain. The New Testament writer James says the same thing regarding God's commands: *whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point has become guilty of breaking all of it.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Can anyone honestly claim that they have never had a sinful thought, word, or deed in their entire life? No, we can't. "Are you saying that God would damn a person to hell for just one minor sin?". Yes, that is what the Bible says. All sin — regardless of how major or minor it is in our eyes — is rebellion against God and deserves to be punished.

"But that is so unfair! How can God be so cruel? There are far worse people than me..." Friend, God does not compare you to others. He compares you to himself. God is holy. Just as darkness cannot exist in light, the Holy God cannot tolerate sin in His presence. He is, therefore, absolutely justified in condemning every sinner — regardless of how great or small their sins might seem to us. HOWEVER, before we start unjustly accusing God of being hateful and harsh, He wants you to know something else about him: *God is love.*^{iv} He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone.^v That is why he took it upon himself to save us.

So, how did God solve our sin problem? By sending his sinless Son into the world to suffer our punishment in our place. The Bible says: *God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.*^{vi} In other words, Jesus, who had no sin, took all sins upon himself to such a degree that it seemed as if he were sin personified. God punished Jesus in our place. On the cross, Jesus paid our debt in full. How do we know? Because Jesus rose from the dead — something that would have been impossible for him to do unless he had paid for all sin. This is why St. Paul says: ⁵⁵*Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory?* ⁵⁶*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!* Jesus' resurrection proves that he has both kept God's law perfectly in our place and paid for our sins in full. Because of Jesus, God has declared peace with us.

But how does this help a person struggling with immense guilt and shame? Let me give you a real-life example. I met a young father who, in a moment of drug-infused anger, beat his infant child the day before I was going to baptize it. The child survived, but the young father was taken to jail, absolutely devastated by what he did. He wished he could erase that horrible day from history. His own family forsook him — and who could blame them after what he did? Having hurt his infant child, he wondered if God could ever forgive him.

What comfort did Christ's resurrection give this man? It was proof that Jesus paid for his sin in full. As that young man turned to the Lord in genuine repentance and faith, he could be comforted that even though the world would not forgive him, God forgave him for Christ's sake. Yes, even though his body needed to be in jail as discipline for his crime, his soul could be at peace with the LORD.

The same is true for you: if you ever feel like you have gone too far — that your sins are too horrible to be forgiven — remember Christ's resurrection and what it means: that all your sins have been paid for in full. You can repent to God knowing that He will forgive you for Jesus' sake. Yes, even though you still may have to suffer the earthly consequences of your sin, your soul can be at peace before God — free from guilt and shame. Why? Because Jesus' resurrection means God forgives your past. It also means that he has secured your future.

Part Two: Your Future is secure.

I have the privilege of ministering to people who are dying. I call this a privilege because the Christians often strengthen my faith when I visit as I see how they face their future in faith.

I remember a woman who had pancreatic cancer. The doctors told her that she would have to face a slow and agonizing death. I watched as she became weaker and weaker. As her death slowly approached, we spent plenty of time together – talking about how Jesus forgave her past sins, especially the ones she regretted from her youth. We talked about heaven and that because Jesus rose from the grave, she, too, will rise on the last day.

Our sermon text says: ⁵¹*Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But once this perishable body has put on imperishability, and this mortal body has put on immortality, then what is written will be fulfilled: Death is swallowed up in victory.*

Jesus saved not only our souls but also our bodies. That is why he promises to raise the dead on the last day – glorifying believers’ bodies so that they might resemble his glorious body.

Almost every Christian has wondered: “What will we look like in heaven?” The Bible says that we will be raised with our very own flesh^{vii} – so we will look like ourselves with one exception: our bodies will be imperishable. The curse of sin – decay, aging, weakness, disease, and death - all of these will be gone. What will our bodies be like? Listen to how the Bible describes it: *By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, [Jesus] will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body.*^{viii}

How does Christ’s resurrection comfort the Christian with cancer whose body is falling apart? Because Jesus rose from the dead, she can know that her future is secure: that she, too, will rise from the dead on the last day with a glorified body. She, who is bedridden and in so much pain, will jump, sing and dance - all without disease, pain, or decay. The best part is that she will be with her Saviour and see him face to face. Yes, because Jesus rose from the dead, so will you.

Part Three: Your present has purpose.

As children grow into adulthood, they start to wonder about their identity – wanting their lives to have meaning. Depressed people, for example, often struggle with the question, “Who am I, and what purpose do I serve on this earth?” People who are depressed frequently feel like their life has no meaning or purpose. Thankfully, Christ’s resurrection offers people a new, everlasting identity so full of purpose and meaning that they will be able to face and cope with whatever problems come their way in hope.

How does Christ’s resurrection offer you a new identity? The apostle Paul put it this way: *So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come!*^{ix}

Because our sins died with Christ, they are gone for good. More than that, because he rose free from sin, God considers all those connected to Christ through faith free from sin. By creating faith in our hearts, the Holy Spirit has given us a new identity: we are God's children, coheirs of heaven with Christ. And as God's children, our lives have a new purpose and meaning: to grow in faith and live to God's glory as we share the good news of what Christ has done with others so they, too, might be saved.

There you have it: we have just answered some of life's most challenging questions! What gives your life meaning? Jesus. What purpose do you have on this earth? To grow in your relationship with God through faith in Jesus and use the gifts God has given you to share the good news of Jesus with others.

But that's hard to do. People don't want to hear that they are sinful. They do not want to believe they need a Saviour. The drug of material wealth has numbed our society into spiritual complacency. The devil has blinded people into thinking there is no absolute truth: that they can do and be whatever they want without any negative repercussions. People view prayer and Bible study like calling 911 – you only do it in an emergency.

And the world's rejection of the Gospel wears us down. We wonder, "Why don't people believe my confession of Christ? Is it me? Maybe all the time and labour I dedicate to the Gospel's cause is in vain because the "same old, same old" keeps happening. Maybe I should give up."

Whenever you are tempted to feel this way, remember what Paul says in our sermon text:

⁵⁸Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

And why is our labour not in vain? Because Jesus rose from the dead. The message we believe is true: forgiveness and life are ours through faith in Christ Jesus. God promises to help us grow in faith as we study his word. Jesus is the meaning of our life. The success of our work is not found in who or how many believe our message but in our faithfulness to the Gospel. This is why our work is not in vain: no matter how few or many listen to our witness, God finds joy in our faithfulness to Him and love for others. More than that, he promises to use our witness in ways we can't conceive. Just as planting winter wheat before the snow falls might seem pointless, it never is because God will raise the seeds in the spring. He also promises that our witness of Christ always has a purpose and effect – even if we never see it.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: do you now see the relevancy and meaning Christ's resurrection has for your life? Because Christ rose, you can be confident that your sins are forgiven. Because Christ rose, you can be sure that eternal life is yours. Because Christ rose, you can be sure that your work for him is not in vain. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. *Romans 6:23*

ⁱⁱ Cf. *1 John 3:4*

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- iii *James 2:10 EHV*
iv 1 Joh 4:8b EHV
v Cf. Ezekiel 18:32 & 33:11
vi 2 Corinthians 5:21
vii Cf. Job 19:26-27
viii *Philippians 3:21 EHV*
ix 2 Corinthians 5:17 EHV