

“Between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection”
1 Peter 3:18-20
(Preached at Trinity, Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. This morning commemorates one of the greatest events in the history of the world – the Resurrection of our Lord.
 - A. You can imagine the scene. Jesus had been crucified and died and was taken down from the cross and quickly placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea because the Sabbath was about to begin. The excitement and expectation of the previous months have come to a crashing end.
 - B. After the Sabbath had ended a group of ladies came with spices to properly prepare the body of Jesus for burial. Their emotions were many. You can imagine their grief and sorrow—their overwhelming sense of loss.
 - C. Upon arriving at the tomb they discovered the stone already moved and looking into the tomb they found it to be empty. Now they were filled with great bewilderment to accompany their grief – Had someone stolen the body of Jesus? Then they saw the angels and they were filled with fear. Finally, Mary sees Jesus and her grief turned to unspeakable joy.
Matthew 28:8 – “And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.”
2. This is the most joyous day in the life of the Christian church.
He has risen!! He's not dead!! He's alive!!
3. The resurrection has been troublesome for many. They can't grasp that the dead can come alive. It is contrary to every scientific evaluation. Rather than believe they deny this event to their condemnation. The truth is simple: The resurrection is essential to the Gospel.
If you remove the resurrection you remove the essence of Christianity
 - The Resurrection is our guarantee that the sacrifice of Christ was accepted, that it accomplished propitiation, that the wrath of God has been appeased.
 - If you remove the resurrection Jesus died and went to the grave where He decayed like all mortal flesh. It would mean that He was nothing more than a martyr, a zealot who died for His cause.
 - If you remove the resurrection, we have no hope of life – we face nothing but the surety of hell.**1 Corinthians 15:19-20** – “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. ²⁰ But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

6. This is my twenty-first year to preach an Easter message to this congregation. Each year I've tried to present a different aspect of the Resurrection. This year I want us to ponder a question tied to this glorious event. It was posed by one of our young members for a topic of study for Discipleship Training. The question is this: Where was Jesus and what was He doing between His death and His resurrection.
7. This is a good question. It is not a question free from difficulties and so it's been answered in different ways. This morning I hope to give you some insight into the question.
 - I. Our starting place must always be the text of Scripture.
 - A. Jesus died for the sins of His people
1 Peter 3:18 NAU - "For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust"
 1. His death was an atoning sacrifice that brought to an end the entire Old Covenant sacrificial system
 "Christ also died for sins once for all"
 - a. This text tells us He died.
 "having been put to death in the flesh"
 - b. This has been the place of heretical doctrines throughout history
 - There have been some who have denied the humanity of Christ and thus deny that He could have died
 - Others, denying the resurrection, insist that Jesus merely swooned and later recovered.
 - c. Our text tells us clearly that Jesus died, and that He died for sin.
 - d. During the Old Covenant, continual sacrifices had to be made for the sins of the people. Year after year their blood was sprinkled upon the mercy seat. They provided no permanent solution for sin. They were designed to point forward to Christ.
 - e. The sacrifice of Christ was "Once for all."
 2. His death provided a just remedy for sin; a just means of restoring a sinner to a right standing before God.
 "*the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God"
 - a. We have sinned against God. His holiness has been offended and His wrath is kindled against us – we are justly condemned. Justice demands satisfaction. The eternal display of His condemnation is hell.
 - b. The crucifixion of Christ provided a just substitute, an atoning sacrifice so that God's wrath might be turned away; His justice satisfied.
 - B. Having accomplished our redemption Jesus was raised on the third day
 "but made alive in the spirit"
 1. This passage too presents some exegetical issues
 Should the word "spirit" be capitalized? In other words, is it referring to the Holy Spirit or is it referring to the human spirit?
 2. Translations vary:
 NASB, ESV - "but made alive in the spirit"
 KJV, NIV - "but made alive in (or by) the Spirit."
 (the TR inserts the article before the word, πνεύματι)

3. Grammatically, it could be translated either way. And there are strengths to both exegetical arguments.
 - a. For those who hold to the human spirit they stress that Peter is giving a contrast between the physical death of Jesus and His spirit which remained alive.
 - b. For those who interpret it as the Holy Spirit, the stress is upon the resurrection. The verb “made alive” is in the passive voice which tells us the subject is receiving the action of the verb. In other words, Jesus died in the flesh but the Holy Spirit made Him alive.
4. I want to accept the Holy Spirit interpretation except for the context of the next verse. I think we should read:

“Jesus died in the flesh but was made to remain alive in the spirit,”
 “in which he went and made proclamation. . .”

In other words, He died in the flesh but His spirit remained alive.

 - a. It also seems to read better by using the same dative form – “put to death *IN* the flesh,” “made alive *IN* the spirit.”
 - b. Followed by the preposition in **Verse 19** – “in which he went . . .”

II. The question before us this morning is, what did Jesus do in the spirit for the three days before His resurrection?

- A. In terms of *our* activity between our death and resurrection the answer seems clear
 1. We enter what is called, “The intermediate state.”
 2. We read in our Confession: *Chapter 31: Of the State of Man After Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead – Paragraph 1:*
 “The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (*their spirits*), which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, where they are with Christ, and behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell; where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day; besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.”
 3. The thief on the cross died along with Jesus. Jesus told him, “Today you (*your spirit*) will be with me in paradise.” In other words, both Jesus and the thief would enter into the intermediate state.
- B. The intermediate state of Jesus, however, has raised some questions.
 1. Some hold that Jesus went to hell and preached to the condemned souls who died before His appearing – for example, those who lived during the days of Noah who mocked at his preaching. In other words, they get a chance to hear the Gospel and be saved. This must be rejected. No one gets a second chance at mercy. “Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”

2. Did the early church fathers hold a view that Jesus descended into hell.
 - a. According to “Apostles’ Creed” this is the affirmation of faith – “I believe.”
 “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.
 The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.”
 - b. Actually, this phrase was not in the earliest versions of the Creed. It reflected an improper translation of the word “hades.”
3. Notice, Peter says nothing about Jesus descending into hell, nor that He even went down or descended. He only says that He “went.”
1 Peter 3:19 - "in which also He went and made proclamation"
4. There is a variation of this position that is more plausible.
 - a. When Jesus died He delivered a proclamation to those in the abyss, the bottomless pit filled with the demons, to declare His victory over Satan.
 The word in **Verse 19** for “proclamation” is κηρύσσω is different from the word, “to preach the Gospel” (εὐαγγελίζω). κηρύσσω describes a herald. Jesus did not go to preach the Gospel but to proclaim His victory.
 - b. Paul wrote of Jesus descending to set the captives free, but he doesn’t say He descended into hell. Paul is merely speaking of Jesus descending at His incarnation to accomplish the redemption of His people who were held captive by sin and Satan.
Ephesians 4:8-10 KJV - "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ⁹ (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)"
 - c. In Colossians Paul wrote of the defeat of Satan at the cross
Colossians 2:14-15 NAS - "having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us *and* which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

- d. Jesus also declared this victory
Luke 11:20-22 NAS - "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²¹
 "When a strong *man*, fully armed, guards his own homestead, his possessions are undisturbed; ²² but when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied, and distributes his plunder."
- C. Nowhere in the New Testament are we told that Jesus went to hell.
1. As Jesus died He proclaimed, "It is finished."
 2. Peter preached in Acts that Jesus entered hades.
Acts 2:29-31 NAS - "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ "And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat *one* of his descendants upon his throne, ³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay."
 - a. The KJV translates this hell. This might explain the meaning of the Apostles Creed.
 - b. Hades is not hell but rather the abode of the dead—a temporary place where the dead await the resurrection.
 - c. Again, we find the words of our Lord to the thief:
Luke 23:43 NAU - "And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."
 - d. Upon His death, Jesus returned to the Father in spirit to await His resurrection.
 3. Another way to interpret 1 Peter 3:18-20:
 In spirit, Jesus preached through Noah during his day, proclaiming God's condemnation of sin and of repentance. This was Augustine's view.
2 Peter 2:4-5 KJV - "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; ⁵ And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly"
 - a. In other words, when the Word of God is accurately preached it is Christ preaching.
 - b. People deny this today because they reject the power of God in preaching.
 Preaching is the power of God to save precisely because it is Christ preaching. There is no power in the words of a man.

Conclusion:

There are some much more important considerations.

1. First, where is Jesus today?

Hebrews 1:3 NAS - "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"

- a. The resurrection demonstrated the sovereign dominion of Christ. He has been raised to glory.

- b. Have you bowed before Him. Is His dominion evident in every area of your life?

2. If you have not received Christ as Lord and Savior don't expect to have another chance beyond the grave. Whatever 1 Peter 3 means, it does not mean that Jesus went to hell to give condemned sinners a second chance.

Hebrews 9:27 NAU - "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment,"

Hebrews 3:14-15 NAS - "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; ¹⁵ while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me."