

Sermon 59, The Resurrection in Acts, Select.

Proposition: This Easter, we see that Jesus is alive, and that His resurrection means that we will rise, that we have hope, that we have the Holy Spirit, and that the kingdom of darkness is losing.

- I. Jesus Is Alive, 1:3
- II. Jesus Is the First to Rise from the Dead, 26:23
- III. Jesus' Resurrection Is the Hope of Israel, 28:20
 - A. The Prophets Foretold the Resurrection, 2:31
 - B. The Apostles Saw the Resurrection, 1:22, 4:33
- IV. Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension Empowered Him to Pour out His Spirit, 2:32-33
- V. Jesus' Resurrection Raises the Dead and Presents them Alive at Dawn, 20:7-12
- VI. Jesus' Resurrection Shows that He Conquers Darkness, 26:23

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this glorious Easter Sunday we are going to step back from our verse-by-verse march through the book of Acts, and we are going to look at some of the key points Luke makes about the resurrection in this book. The Christian faith has many unique teachings, and certainly the Incarnation and the Trinity are without parallel in other religions. But I would argue that another doctrine that really sets our faith apart from the rest is its teaching on the resurrection of the dead. We believe that Jesus was really killed and that He really rose from the dead. But the resurrection means more than that Jesus is alive, as important as that is. As we will see from various statements in Acts today, the resurrection is the ultimate sign of Christ's power. It means that we too will rise from the dead, that we too have hope that this world will be set right and death vanquished, that we can share God's Holy Spirit, and that the kingdom of darkness is losing as the light of Christ shines forth.

I. Jesus Is Alive, 1:3

The first and most basic point to make about the resurrection of the Son of God is this: It really happened. It was not a psychological event, in which the disciples somehow realized that they could continue the mission that Jesus lived for, even though He was dead. It was not an ethical event, where people had a change of heart and stopped doing things that lead to death and instead began doing things that lead to life. It was not a political event, where the nation of Israel regained its independence from Rome. No, that's not what the resurrection was. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was an event in which a dead man came back to life. Death was undone, canceled, as though it had never happened. Luke informs us not only that Jesus came back to life, but that He showed many convincing proofs that He was alive over a period of 40 days.

Now, you can fool people for hours, even for days. But to fool the people who knew Jesus best, for a period of 40 days? Impossible. The apostles would have known that they were dealing with an impostor long before the end of the fifth week of spending time with the man

claiming to be Jesus. Brothers and sisters, in way after way, day after day, Jesus showed that it was really Him and that He was really alive, just like He had prophesied.

That's why we are here today: Jesus of Nazareth is alive and seated at the right hand of God. That is what Easter is about. We confess that death was beaten and had to give up its victim, who returned to life and walked out of the tomb under His own power.

II. Jesus Is the First to Rise from the Dead, 26:23

But we confess far more than that. You see, the Christian faith is about far more than a single isolated resurrection 2000 years ago. We believe, in accordance with the apostles' teaching, that the resurrection of Jesus is just the first of many, many resurrections. In fact, we believe that death will eventually be undone for everyone who believes in Jesus. That is what Paul is getting at when he says in Acts 26:23 that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead. He means that eventually, on the last day, every human being will rise from the dead, those who have done well to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. Specifically, we believe that resurrection is a two-stage process just like death is a two-stage process. Every fallen human has already been through the first stage of death. We all start out spiritually dead, thanks to the death our first parents received for eating the forbidden fruit. They pass that death on to us.

If nothing changes, that death will work itself out in bodily death and then in the lake of fire, which is the second death. But if God intervenes and spiritually raises you from the dead, then you will still die physically, but instead of going to the lake of fire you will rise bodily from the dead and spend eternity in heaven with God.

Jesus is the first to rise from the dead, but He is not the last. We worship Him today not only because He is risen, but because in union with Him we too will rise.

III. Jesus' Resurrection Is the Hope of Israel, 28:20

That message is what Paul referred to as "the hope of Israel." He was chained up, under house arrest in Rome. He sent for the Jewish leaders in the city and told them about how he had been arrested in Jerusalem and forced to appeal to Caesar. And then, he adds "I am wearing this chain for the hope of Israel."

What was the hope of Israel? Ultimately, the hope of Israel was that God would act to set everything right. Israel understood that this would not happen in this age, for the in-breaking of God would mark a decisive turning point in world history. Once God acted to set it right, the world would have indeed entered a new era. The empty boast on the back of our dollar bill, *novus ordo seclorum*, is just that — empty. The founding of America did not mark a new order of the ages; rather, the old order of great power politics continues, albeit with more deadly weapons than ever. But when God acted to restore Israel, as prophesied in Ezekiel 37 and other places, human divisions would be healed, the people of God reunited, the Spirit of God poured out in His fullness, and ultimately, the effects of sin canceled and undone. The worst of sin's effects, death, would be reversed, as Ezekiel foretold when he saw the dry bones come together, bone to its bone, be clothed with flesh, and stand up and live, an exceedingly great army.

The day when that would happen in reality, instead of merely in prophecy, was the day for which Israel hoped. That is what Zechariah and Elizabeth, and the other devout people who, Luke tells us, were waiting for the consolation of Israel, were hoping for.

A. The Prophets Foretold the Resurrection, 2:31

That hope of Israel was not something that had been created by novelists, journalists, or propaganda artists. It was something that had been foretold by the prophets, from the moment in the Garden when God said to the serpent “I will put enmity between you and the woman” to the day four hundred years before Christ when Malachi promised that the Sun of Righteousness would rise with healing in His wings. But one of the places in which the resurrection came to clearest expression, as told by Luke, was in David’s prayer that we know as Psalm 16. David was not only a King; he was a prophet. He saw the future; he knew that God had made him an unshakeable promise. That promise was a promise relating to what we have seen is Luke’s favorite theme — the Kingdom. The promise was that David would have a descendant on the throne of his Kingdom, and that that descendant would not be held by death. The Kingdom of God is too great to be ruled by a temporary monarch, one who will die and leave the kingdom to his son. No. The Kingdom of God, as God Himself swore to David, will in the final analysis be governed by a monarch who is more powerful than death. That monarch was not David; he is dead and buried. That monarch was not Solomon; he too is dead and buried. But David’s descendant 28 generations later was Jesus of Nazareth — and in the literal words of the psalm, he was not abandoned to death, and God did not let Him see corruption.

He did experience death, but it was temporary — so short lived, in fact, that His body did not have any time to rot. David knew this; he looked for one of his sons to be the conqueror of death.

B. The Apostles Saw the Resurrection, 1:22, 4:33

But as Luke highlights, the apostles saw the resurrection. They were eyewitnesses, to the point that Peter says that in order to be an apostle you have to be “a witness to His resurrection.” Indeed, as Luke later puts it, “With great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Act 4:33 ESV).

David spoke in the Spirit regarding events that would happen a thousand years after his death. Peter, John, Paul, and the rest spoke of things they had seen with their own eyes. This is the hope of Israel; we have seen it, and we testify that we have seen it. Brothers and sisters, everything we know about Jesus is from the apostles. We have nothing written by him, but only books by the apostles — four gospels, Acts, Revelation, and 21 letters. All of them bear witness to the historical reality of the resurrection.

So we celebrate Easter this morning because it is a hope fulfilled, a dream come true. Science may figure out how to postpone death a few more years. It will never figure out how to reverse death, for only God can raise the dead. Death is a judicial sentence imposed by His hand, and only His hand is powerful enough to reverse the sentence He has imposed. The resurrection, in short, is an act of God — an act that He performed for His Son, and someday for all who are united to His Son by faith.

IV. Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension Empowered Him to Pour out His Spirit, 2:32-33

Well, not only did Jesus really rise from the dead, thus fulfilling the hope of Israel that sin and death would be undone and reversed — His resurrection empowered Him to give the best gift that was ever given. I'm talking about the Holy Spirit.

Stuff is a decent gift, though mere things get old and break. Real estate is a really nice gift, because land endures as long as this planet does. But the Holy Spirit of God is a divine person. To have Him is to have the Father. Notice how Peter says that God raised Jesus from the dead, raised Jesus to His right hand, and then gave Him the authority to pour out the Holy Spirit. In some important sense, the resurrection is how Jesus gained the right to pour out the fullness of His own Spirit.

What does the Spirit do? He changes hearts and lives. He convicts the world. He restrains evil. He grows the fruits of love, joy, and peace in the hearts and lives of Jesus' followers. He testifies about Jesus. And He lives within everyone who believes in Christ.

That is part of what we celebrate on Easter. Yes, Pentecost is a separate holiday. But it follows Easter because it was through Easter, through the resurrection, that Jesus as man gained the right to bestow His Spirit on you and me.

Do you know the Spirit? Love the Spirit? Value the Spirit? Pray for and to the Spirit? Recognize that without Jesus' Spirit you can do nothing? Brothers and sisters, if you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give His Spirit to those who ask Him?

V. Jesus' Resurrection Shows that He Conquers Darkness, 26:23

Finally, to return to Paul's statement that we looked at earlier, we see that the resurrection of Jesus as the firstfruits from the dead gave Him the right to proclaim light to the world. Jesus brings light to Jew and Gentile alike.

What does light do? It drives out darkness. And what is the source of the darkness? Not just the absence of light, but the presence of the forces of darkness — i.e., Satan's kingdom. Jesus, as the firstborn from the dead, is now the ruler of the kings of the earth, and His kingdom is spreading unstopably and driving back the darkness.

There is still much darkness in the world. The world lieth in the wicked one. But the light has come, and the darkness has not overcome it and will never be able to overcome it. That is the message of Easter; that is the meaning of the resurrection of the Son of God. Resurrection is intimately connected to the Kingdom; Jesus has the right to reign because He has conquered the greatest and worst enemies of the human race — death, sin, and Satan. Join His team. Get on His bandwagon. Follow Him in triumphal procession — because then death, sin, and Satan can't touch you. They couldn't conquer your champion; they can't conquer you. Amen.