

Easter Sunday 2020

*“He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”
(Matthew 28:6 ESV)*

*“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”
(Mark 16:6 ESV)*

*It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.
(Romans 4:24–25 ESV)*

The Resurrection Of Jesus Christ

Easter Sunday

April 12th, 2020

Romans 1:4 et al.

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church – and welcome to this very unusual Easter Sunday morning celebration. We’ve been using the phrase “Easter In Exile” over the last couple of weeks because there is a sense in which our current situation is analogous to the experience of the Old Testament church in Babylonian Exile. They too were separated from the feasts and the festivals that meant so much to them – and they understood that while they were separated from Jerusalem their worship would be different – there were certain songs that they just couldn’t pull off in a foreign land.

Are you feeling that today?

Do you miss the BIG EASTER CHOIR?

Do you miss the loud shouts?

Christ is RISEN – HE IS RISEN INDEED – doesn’t sound quite the same when it’s just me shouting at you through your computer, does it?

And that's ok.

We have been here before and just as there was purpose in it the last time, I believe there is purpose in it again this time. And part of the purpose might be a sort of “stripping down to basics”. There is a sense in which we can get so caught up in the FEEL of Easter that we actually don't THINK a great deal about the MEANING of Easter. It is just so fun to wave goodbye to winter and to put on our brightest dress and our fanciest hat and to sing our favourite songs and to celebrate with all our friends and family – that we can go home HAPPY on Easter without really understanding WHY.

Why is the empty tomb so significant?

Why is EASTER SUNDAY such a big deal?

It we are saved by the DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS – then why does it matter that he rose BODILY from the dead on the third day?

What if he had been raised as a Spirit?

What if his SOUL rose from the dead and ascended to the Father's right hand and what if his body had remained in the grave – how would our faith be any different?

Well apparently it would be different – the Apostle Paul said:

“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:17 ESV)

So this is not an add on – this is not a bonus – this isn't about our faith being BETTER – apparently the resurrection is NECESSARY and ESSENTIAL for our salvation. IT MATTERS, brothers and sisters, that Jesus ROSE from the dead.

And so today, since we can't really show each other our yellow dresses and since we can't amuse each other with our fancy hats and since we can't stir each other up with loud singing or glad

shouting – today I thought, we could think together for a minute about what it MEANS that Jesus rose bodily from the dead.

I'd like to focus in on three things in particular.

What Does It Mean That Jesus Rose Bodily From The Dead?

If you have your Bible with you, I'd love for you to open it now to the beginning of Paul's Letter To The Romans. The first 4 verses of that epistle read as follows:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:1–4 ESV)

The first thing we can say with confidence then is that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead means that Jesus is the Son of God.

1. It means that Jesus is the Son of God

Paul says that Jesus was DECLARED to be the Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness, BY his resurrection from the dead.

Now, theologians argue amongst themselves as to whether the Greek word here is better translated as “declared” or “appointed”. Meaning is Paul saying that the resurrection PROVED who Jesus ALWAYS WAS or is he saying that the resurrection POSITIONED Jesus for NEW AUTHORITY and LORDSHIP?

I think the answer is BOTH to be perfectly honest with you – in fact I imagine that is why Paul chose a word that can mean BOTH. Certainly the resurrection PROVED that Jesus was who he said he was. Adrian Warnock puts it this way, he says:

“The resurrection of Jesus has evidencing power.”¹

And certainly it does, I don't know how you could argue you with that. The empty tomb IS the single greatest argument for the identity and authority of Jesus Christ. Regular people don't rise from the dead. Thought provoking teachers don't rise from the dead. Death is not so easily escaped from – God himself made that very clear in Deuteronomy 32:39. He said:

“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and **there is none that can deliver out of my hand.**” (Deuteronomy 32:39 ESV)

So every Bible reading Jew ought to have understood the implications when Jesus rose BODILY from the dead. He obviously did not ESCAPE from death – rather he must have been Sovereign OVER death and if he was Sovereign over death then he must be..... God himself.

See now that I even I am he – the God who is Sovereign over death – and there is no god beside me. I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal and there is none that can deliver from my hand.

Thus, there can be no doubt about it – the empty tomb has EVIDENCING POWER – to say the least.

So there is a sense in which Jesus was DECLARED to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead.

But the other sense is important also – and many scholars would argue, is actually primary. Meaning that they believe that Paul's emphasis actually is less on WHO JESUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN – God of very God – and MORE ON who he BECAME as a result of the resurrection.

Now hear this very carefully – Jesus was ALWAYS GOD. John 1:1 says:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1 ESV)

¹ <https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-does-raised-for-our-justification-mean/>

So Jesus did not become the second person of the Trinity because he rose from the dead. That is not a position you can earn. But the title “Son of God” has a particular meaning in the Bible that Jesus FULLY ASSUMED by rising from the dead.

So for example Thomas Schreiner says here:

“Jesus was “appointed” to be God’s Son in power at the resurrection of the dead. He was exalted to a level of power and authority that he did not have previously. ... The appointment of Jesus being described here is his appointment as the messianic king.”²

Here is where it is helpful to be familiar with the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament there is a sense in which all of Israel was understood as God’s son. So for example in Hosea 11 it says:

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” (Hosea 11:1 ESV)

So all Israel was in a sense – God’s son. But there was a particular sense in which the KING of Israel was God’s son. So for example we think of Psalm 2 which says:

⁶ “As for me, I have set **my King** on Zion, my holy hill.”

⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

¹² **Kiss the Son**, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:6–12 ESV)

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* in the Baker Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 42.

All of this of course goes back to the promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7. God said to King David:

“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and **he shall be to me a son.**” (2 Samuel 7:12–14 ESV)

So God promised David that after he was dead one of his descendants would be RAISED UP and ESTABLISHED as the eternal Son of God – the KING upon whom would rest the never-ending blessing and authority of Almighty God on planet earth.

That’s why the Apostle Paul said that Jesus was from the line of David – go back to the start of Paul’s letter and let’s read those verses again. He talks about Jesus:

“who was **descended from David** according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:3–4 ESV)

So the resurrection certainly PROVED that Jesus was everything he said he was – it had EVIDENCING POWER – but it also POSITIONED Jesus to inherit all of the blessings and POWER promised to a future Son of David – the one who would be in an ultimate sense – THE SON OF GOD. THE ETERNAL DAVIDIC KING who would reign on EARTH with all the SANCTION and AUTHORITY of God in heaven.

That’s what the empty tomb means.

It means there is a King who will reign over all things – on this earth – for the glory of God and the good of his people FOREVER.

I like how N.T Wright puts it, he says:

“The resurrection means that Jesus is the messianic ‘son of god’; that Israel’s eschatological hope has been fulfilled; that it is time for the nations of the world to be brought into submission to Israel’s God.”³

And that’s why Jesus said when giving the Great Commission:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18–20 ESV)

Thanks be to God!

The second thing we can say with confidence is that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead means that death has been defeated.

2. It means that death is defeated

That’s the argument that Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 15 – please turn there now in your Bibles. It’s a fairly long argument so we won’t read it all but I will attempt to direct your eyes to the pivotal verses. Let’s look first at verses 19-20. Paul says there:

“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:19–20 ESV)

So Paul says that if Jesus were ONLY relevant to this life – if he was just a good example to follow and – if we can even say this - just an atoning sacrifice for our sins – we would be of all people most to be pitied. Because even FORGIVEN people suffer and die – is that not so?

Think it through. Are you forgiven right now Christian? If you know the Gospel then you know that the answer is YES.

³ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection Of The Son Of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 726.

In Ephesians 1:7-8 the Apostle Paul said:

“In him we have redemption through his blood, **the forgiveness of our trespasses**, according to the riches of his grace,⁸ which he **lavished** upon us, in all wisdom and insight” (Ephesians 1:7–8 ESV)

(LAVISHED is PAST TENSE – AORIST TENSE actually denoting an action completed in the past.)

That’s why the Bible can say:

“as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.” (Psalm 103:12 ESV)

That’s the forgiveness that is LAVISHED UPON US the moment we put our faith in Christ – so let me ask again brothers and sisters: are you forgiven of your sins?

And the answer, if you are in Christ, must be a resounding YES!

But here is my follow up question: Are you suffering difficulties and tribulations in this fallen world?

And the answer to that has to be yes as well.

And don’t fake it. Don’t pretend that you are not suffering as though admitting would let down the team – no Jesus said:

“In the world you will have tribulation.” (John 16:33 ESV)

So we all suffer. We all face difficulties – that’s why Paul says that if our faith was ONLY about the teaching of Jesus and the atonement of Jesus – we would still be people to be pitied – because we would suffer with no prospect of ultimate victory. But thanks be to God, that is NOT our situation.

“in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:19–20 ESV)

So that’s what CHANGES the equation – it is the EMPTY TOMB which changes the equation. The Pillar NT Commentary says here:

“Were it not for that future glory (which he identifies with our participation in the resurrection) our present sufferings would need to be interpreted through a very different calculus.”⁴

So Paul is saying that what Jesus did applies to MORE than JUST our lives down here on earth – in fact the ultimate application is to our LIVES on the other side of death. He goes on to talk about that later in 1 Corinthians 15. As I said, it’s a long argument. Drop down in your bible to verse 48. Remember Paul has just said that Jesus is the FIRSTFRUITS of those who have fallen asleep – that is who have died – and who have IN FACT been raised from the dead. To call Jesus the FIRST FRUITS is to imply that others will surely follow. Which is exactly the point he makes in verses 48-49:

“As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.” (1 Corinthians 15:48–49 ESV)

So – just like we SHARED in the death of Adam – just as we were included in his trajectory, down, down, down to the dust – so if we are united by faith with Christ – the man of heaven – so we shall share in his trajectory – up, up, up from the grave and into the very presence of God!

Just as Jesus was resurrected, so too WE will be resurrected. Paul concludes his argument in verse 51-57:

“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.⁵³ For this

⁴Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 759.

perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

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.” (1 Corinthians 15:51–57 ESV)

So if you are in Christ – whether you will ever actually die or not, I don’t know, Paul says. Jesus could come back tomorrow – or not for 2000 years or 5000 years – I don’t know the date of his return – but I do know this: whether we sleep or not – we shall all BE CHANGED!

In a moment!!!

In the twinkling of an eye!!

The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend – and we who have died will ARISE – the perishable shall put on the imperishable and then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory! O death, where is your victory! O death where is your sting!!”

Are you hearing that brothers and sisters? On the last day – when Jesus comes and when the dead are raised we will MOCK DEATH and the GRAVE as are lifted up into heaven. We shall laugh and cheer as death and hades are cast into the lake of fire and remembered no more.

Are you ready for that day?

Thanks be to God who gives us that victory through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

The empty tomb MEANS that death has been defeated and will one day be DESTROYED.

Hallelujah!

Thirdly then and finally, we can say with confidence that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead means that we can go home.

3. It means that we can go home

Maybe one of the benefits to this “Easter in Exile” is that we will finally realize that we are not home. I’ve said many times before that one of the challenges of being a mission minded Christian in Canada is that you have a hard time convincing people that this world isn’t already heaven. Listen, I know that Canada isn’t perfect, but for some people, it comes pretty close. We are the richest, safest, securest people on planet earth – or at least we were until a month ago.

But now all of the sudden people are realizing that WE ARE NOT HOME – and that might actually make it EASIER for us to communicate the Gospel to our friends and neighbours. Because the Gospel is a story about GOING HOME.

The Gospel BEGINS with us at home. The Gospel begins with us in the Garden of God enjoying his goodness – and enjoying each other – without any concept of disease, or sadness or sickness or death. Death isn’t there at the start of the story – it comes in later as a result of sin. Death is about physical decay – yes – but ultimately it is about separation from God. Death is ABOUT EXILE. It is about being THRUST OUT from our natural environment. It is about being DIMINISHED because of our separation and isolation from our Creator. Death is about not being home.

At home with God we are ALIVE. We are US. We are HUMAN.

Away from God we are less and lonely and LOST.

But, thanks be to God – because of the empty tomb, because Jesus rose bodily from the dead – we can go home.

You see, Paul says, that’s what makes SUFFERING PALATABLE in the human life – the knowledge that if we are in Christ then SUFFERING will not have the LAST WORD. He says in Romans 8:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved.” (Romans 8:17–24 ESV)

Do you see that?

In this hope WE WERE SAVED!!!

That’s what this is all about!!

Our faith in Christ is ultimately ABOUT OUR HOPE IN CHRIST!! Our hope that because of Christ – because of his death and because of his resurrection – we shall share in the GLORY OF CHRIST which includes the RENEWAL of all creation.

Let me say that again – which includes the RENEWAL of all creation.

You see, home isn’t “up there” – home is God with us down here. That’s where we came from. That’s what we lost – and in Christ – that is what we gain: God with us - down here!

The world renewed.

Our bodies restored.

Death defeated.

Disease forgotten.

Life resumed.

And Jesus – the Son of David and Son of God - over all.

That's the MEANING OF THE EMPTY TOMB!

That's why THIS IS A REALLY BIG DEAL.

And that's why we ought not to be SHAKEN by this light and momentary affliction known as COVID19. I know that many will suffer – I know many will die – but that has always been true – and few of us will ever suffer as much or as greatly as the Apostle Paul who said:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18 ESV)

This suffering IS REAL, brothers and sisters, but it pales in comparison to the glory that will be revealed to us.

“Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58 NRSV)

We have work to do church – and a story to tell to the nations. Thanks be to God. Let me pray for us.