

Because He Lives!

On Good Friday we remembered Jesus' death on an old rugged cross. It was a bloody scene. It was a lonely experience for Jesus. Not only were Jesus' enemies against Him, but those who were close to Him apparently had deserted Him. Colossians 2:13-14 tells us that we were born into sin, that we were dead in our sins, and as a result headed to hell. We saw that we were sinners and that God was keeping a record of our sins. In Revelation 20 we find that at the final Great White Throne Judgment, God will open the books, and will review the sins that unbelievers have committed over the years. The Book of Life will be God's justification for sending those whose names are not in the Book of Life to the lake of fire. Some people call it Hell. In reality, Hell will end up in the lake of fire.

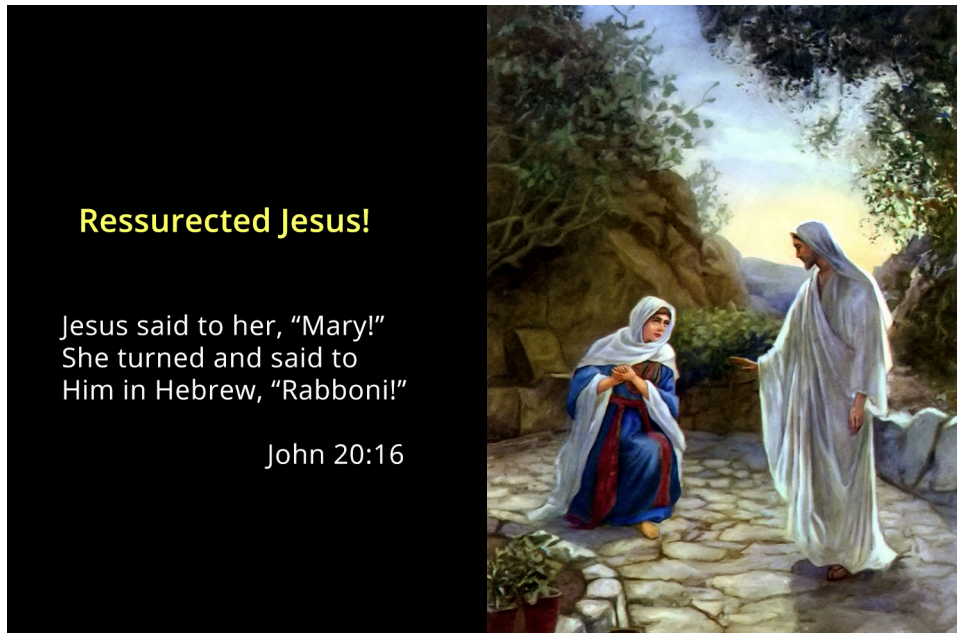
THE DEBT WE CANNOT PAY. We read in Colossians that because of our sins, we have a debt. We have a debt that we cannot pay. It would be like learning that you owed the government one billion dollars. Who among us could pay that debt? I suspect that if the debt rose to ten trillion dollars, no one would be able to pay the debt. God has said that we have a debt if we do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. For those of us who have put our faith in Jesus Christ, the debt has been paid.

Colossians tells us that when Jesus died on the cross, He took out a big eraser, so to speak, and erased the debt. He erased the list of sins that were there because we are told that God does not remember our sins "as far as the east is from the west." We are as clean and as white as snow. God erased the debt and nailed the debt to a tree, to the cross. He nailed them to the cross, and we can say our sins were paid in full because of what Jesus did.

As I was thinking about this earlier, I was reminded of the

hymn, "Jesus Paid it All" by Elvina Hall. I would like to read the third and fourth stanzas for you.

For nothing good have I whereby Thy grace to claim.
I'll wash my garments white in the blood of Calvary's Lamb.
And when before the throne



I stand in Him complete,
Jesus died my soul to save, my lips shall still repeat,
Jesus paid it all.
All to Him I owe.
Sin had left the crimson stain.
He washed it white as snow.

What a great statement: Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. I owe Him because of what He has done for me. Today if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ, you owe Him a great debt because He has taken your sins and erased them off of the debt ledger. There is nothing that you could do to have your sins taken away. Only God could do that. Only God could erase your list of sins and make you ready for Heaven. The song says that "sin had left a crimson

stain,” a stain that you could not remove, a stain that none of us could remove. But Jesus did it. He washed you white as snow. There is no trace of your sins anymore. So because of His sacrifice, because of His death, believers have their sins forgiven. We have the hope that we can be with Jesus forever.

WHY WE CELEBRATE JESUS’ RESURRECTION. Now I want to ask you an important question today. Why do we celebrate Christ’s resurrection? Why is it important? Was not Jesus’ death sufficient? If Jesus’ death erased our sins, then why a resurrection? Why is that important? Why was not Friday sufficient? The two high points for a believer are Jesus’ death and His resurrection. Why is the resurrection important? The answer is found in the pages of scripture. This week I went to the New Testament and looked at every scripture related to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then I looked outside the Gospels. I looked from Acts all the way through Revelation, and this is what I discovered. There are forty-five references to the resurrection in the New Testament outside of the Gospels. One would expect to find references to the resurrection in the Gospels. But forty-five times references are made to Jesus’ resurrection in the rest of the New Testament. Now that ought to tell us that the resurrection is more than just a curiosity, more than just a spectacular event from history past. It tells us that the resurrection is very, very, important.

Now a question: Why is it so important? I want to start by looking at a general statement about the resurrection that will immediately let you know that the resurrection is really important. Then we are going to look at some specifics to answer the question of its importance. Let us start with 1 Corinthians 15:12. We read:

Now if Christ has preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised. 1 Corinthians 15:12 (NASB)

This verse tells us that apparently, some of the Corinthians were thinking that no one would be raised from the dead. They knew that Jesus came back to life, but some were caus-

ing doubts as to whether or not believers would be resurrected or come back to life after their deaths.

Now we come to verse 14 which states,

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is vain. 1 Corinthians 15:14 (NASB)

In an attempt to help them understand the truth, Paul says that if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is vain. If we believe in Jesus Christ but if He never came back to life, all that has happened is that Jesus died and your faith is vain. The word “vain” is *kenos* in the Greek, and it has the idea of empty or nothing. I was thinking about a can of cashews. Several weeks ago we had a can of cashews in the house. It was a small can. I was imagining what would it be like if I opened it and the can was empty? The can would have been worthless! It would have been worthless unless you are collecting empty cans. Otherwise, it would have been absolutely worthless. Paul says your faith is vain. Our can of faith is empty. There is nothing there if Jesus has not been resurrected.

Now look at verse 15,

Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses. 1 Corinthians 15:15 (NASB)

Paul says we are accused of being liars! Someone was accusing the apostles of being liars. They were accused of being false witnesses of God when they said Christ was raised, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 1 Corinthians 15:15-17 (NASB)

Paul says, “Look, if Jesus has not been resurrected, if Jesus has not come back to life, you are still in your sins, you are still going to hell.”

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. 1 Corinthians 15:18-19 (NASB)

Now Paul says if Jesus has not come back to life, if He was never resurrected, if all that happened is He just died, we are really to be pitied. Why? There is no hope. There is no future. We die and then remain in the grave! Do you know what this passage in 1 Corinthians tells us? It is not enough that Jesus died on a Friday for your sins and my sins. He had to come back to life also. Both His death and resurrection are important. Resurrection Sunday alone is not the stellar point in the redemptive plan of God. That is one of the reasons why we met Friday evening and remembered His death, and why we are celebrating Resurrection Sunday. The Resurrection is essential to our salvation.

CHRIST DEFEATED DEATH. Paul just told us that our faith is empty if Jesus has not been resurrected, but he did not tell us why. I want to walk you through three specific reasons that will answer that question. The first one is found in Acts 2. In Acts 2:24 Peter is giving a sermon on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus died and came back to life. In verse 24 we are told:

But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. Acts 2:24 (NASB)

The word for “agony” in the Greek has the idea of birth pangs. If you have given birth, you know what birth pangs are all about. You know the pain of giving birth to a child. That is the picture here of pain associated with death. Paul could say putting an end to the pain associated with death, “since it was impossible for Him to be held by its power.” The last phrase says that death could not hold Christ and He put an end to the pain of death. Jesus conquered death. He defeated death. The only way to get rid of the pain of death is to get rid of death. The only way to get rid of the pain of spiritual death is to conquer spiritual death. In 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 we read,

O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 (NASB)

The message is here is that Jesus defeated death; He conquered death and there is no reason for anyone to go to hell. Our sins can be forgiven. This is the first point. Jesus’ resurrection proved that He defeated death. He eliminated spiritual death. When Jesus died on the cross He was victorious over death.

BELIEVERS HAVE NEW LIFE. The second thing that Jesus’ resurrection accomplished was to guarantee us new life. We find that in 1 Peter 1:3. Here the Apostle Peter writes these words:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3 (NASB)

The word “mercy” here is the Greek word *eleos*. It has the idea that you show kindness or help to someone who cannot help him or herself. Have you ever been in a position where you could not help yourself? I think that happens all the time. Therefore, you go to a doctor because you need help to correct a situation and you cannot do it yourself. Some of us may have plumbers or electricians come in to deal with a problem we cannot handle by ourself.

Did you know you have a sin problem, and there is nothing that you can do to help yourself? Some people say, “Well, I will do a lot of good deeds, and later on God will see all my good deeds. He will say, ‘Oh, okay, you are a very good person at heart so you can get into Heaven.’” No, God says that there are “none righteous, not even one.” “There is none that does good” (Romans 3:10, 12).

As far as God is concerned, you do good things in a worldly sense, but there is nothing that you do that is good enough to get you into Heaven. All of us have sinned. You

may do a lot of good things, but you are just kidding yourself if you think that God is going to think that your deeds are good enough to get you into Heaven. That is why Peter says “great mercy.” The word “mercy” has the idea of God bestowing love on somebody who cannot help him or herself. We can not help ourselves when it comes to our sins. So God in “His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope.” He says we are born again. We receive a new spiritual life. The old self is gone, we have a new life, a new, fresh start.

As I was preparing this message, I was listening to a song that says “I need Thee every hour.” As I was listening to the person sing, “I need Thee every hour,” I have to admit that I could not help but start crying because I need Him every hour. You need Him every hour. Oh, how we need Him every hour. We need our sins forgiven. So God in His great mercy made it possible for us, who have put our faith in Jesus Christ, to be born again to a living hope. The living hope is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That is a promise. Peter is telling us that because of Jesus’ resurrection, we can have new life. At first you might think that just because Jesus conquered and defeated death, because He eliminated the pain of spiritual death, you might assume, “Hey, I am going to Heaven!” Apparently the Corinthians did not think that way. The Corinthians thought that you could have your sins forgiven, but it was not guaranteed you were going to Heaven. What 1 Peter 1:3 tells us is that not only did He defeat death, but He also gave you a new life. It was a promise of new life, a guarantee of a new life. So Jesus’ resurrection did two things: He defeated death, and the resurrection guaranteed us a new life. How did that happen? Turn back to 1 Corinthians 15:20. I would like you to see this very important verse. Paul writes,

But now Christ has been raised from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:20a (NASB)

Paul says, “Look, it is true, Christ has been raised from the dead!” And then he says,

The first fruits of those who are asleep. 1 Corinthians

15:20b(NASB)

Jesus was like the first fruits of those who were believers. What does he mean, “first fruits”? It is just another way of saying He is the first one who came back to life. When He came back to life, He had a new kind of body. It was not like our body; it was a new kind of a body. If you look at verse 42 of 1 Corinthians 15, it says that we have an imperishable body, a body that will not die. It is a body that will not fade away, that will not disappear someday. It is a spiritual body that we receive. With Jesus’ resurrection, not only did He defeat death, the resurrection is a promise that we can have new life. Why? Because He received His new body first when He was resurrected first. What kind of a body? We have already discovered that it was a body that will last forever. Think about when Jesus walked this earth after the resurrection. He walked through walls. He was able to eat. We are given clues in Revelation chapter 21 and 22 which describes Heaven. In our new bodies we are going to be able to drink liquid in Heaven. We are told that He was able to talk. Think what the new bodies will be like. While still on earth, Jesus demonstrated His new body. So those of us who have put our faith in Jesus Christ, our resurrection bodies are going to be something else! It is not going to be like your current body. You might not be too happy with your current body, but the new body you will receive will be awesome!

Now 1 Corinthians 15:23 says,

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming. 1 Corinthians 15:23 (NASB)

He tells us that just like Christ received it first, those of us who put our faith in Jesus Christ, will be given one too. May I ask you today, do you want an eternal body? That is our living hope. Jesus’ resurrection proves that He defeated death. And Jesus’ resurrection is a promise, because He received His new body first, those of us who are believers are going to have a body just like His.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION. The third truth about the importance of the resurrection is found in Romans 4:25. In Romans 4:25, Paul is writing to believers

who are in the city of Rome, and he makes a very important statement. In verse 25, here is what he says:

He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. Romans 4:25 (NASB)

Paul said that Christ was delivered because of our transgressions, and then He was raised because of our justification. Now as you read that, it might seem a little confusing; but let me help you. Let me restate it in a way that might help you understand the meaning of the passage.

Christ was delivered over because of our transgressions, and He was raised because of our justification.

In other words, because we were able to be justified, He was raised. We were justified because He had done the job right. Because He was successful in what He did, God the Father raised Him. Scripture tells us that He was the perfect lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Look at Philippians 2:8, which talks about Jesus Christ who was God in human flesh. In verse 8 we are told,

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:8 (NASB)

Did you know that Jesus did not have to die? He could have chosen to “blow it off,” as we say. He could have chosen just to ignore us. He could have chosen not to do it. In the strictest sense, He did not have to do it, but He chose to die for us. He humbled Himself. When you think about humility, what comes to your mind? The first thing that comes to my mind is someone who is proud, arrogant and wants their own way. They are worried about whether or not people recognize them for what they have done. They want attention, accolades, and approval. They want everyone to feel good about them, to think that they are important. In contrast, Jesus humbled Himself. He did not care about Himself. He cared more about you and me. Philippians 2:9 explains,

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him. Philippians 2:9 (NASB)

Now would God highly exalt Him if He had failed? Do you think that God the Father would have highly exalted Jesus Christ if He had failed in what He came to do? The answer is no! Christ would not have been highly exalted if He had failed. So when we are told in Romans that He was raised for our justification, the point is He was successful. The resurrection proved that Jesus’ death satisfied the Father’s wrath and demands. Those are three specifics as to why the resurrection was important. The resurrection proved that He defeated death. The resurrection is our guarantee that we are going to have new life, and the resurrection proves to us that He satisfied the Father’s demand.

What does all of this mean? That means we are acceptable to God the Father because of what Jesus has done for us. We can be with Him someday in Heaven and not feel ashamed. Would you like to be able to stand before God and not feel ashamed? That is what Jesus’ death has accomplished. That is what His resurrection has provided to us. Now we can stand before Him and not feel ashamed.

FINAL POINT ABOUT THE RESURRECTION. There is one more important thing I want you to understand about the resurrection. It does not relate so much to salvation; it relates to Jesus Himself. Look at Romans 1:4. This is a very important statement. We are told,

Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 1:4 (NASB)

Do you know what the resurrection also proves? It proves that Jesus was and is God. The phrase “Son of God” is another expression, or a different way of saying that He was God. R. Lenski, a great theologian, made the following statement.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the crowning point of His redemptive work, which showed that He is indeed the Son of God and the Savior of the world, and that His dying sacrifice is suffi-

cient to cancel the sins of the world and to satisfy the righteousness of God.¹

We could add a promise of a future, better life. So the resurrection is essential for our salvation.

CONCLUSION. Do you know how many times the resurrection appears in the New Testament? I went online to see if there was a poll related to what the people in the United States believed about Jesus Christ. I found a poll that was published by the Rasmussen Reports organization. It was published in 2009 and they asked people three different questions. They asked people what they believed about Jesus. Did He really walk the earth? Did He die on a cross and did He come back to life? The Rasmussen organization found that 88 percent of Americans believe that Jesus really did exist. Eighty-two percent believe that Jesus died on a cross. Seventy nine percent believe that He was resurrected, that is, He came back to life. I was surprised at the results. Some might believe that it is good news that so many believe Jesus existed, that He died for our sins, and came back to life.

The problem is that the people simply expressed an intellectual belief in a set of facts. Accepting a set of facts about Christ does not make a person a Christian. It does not mean these people are going to Heaven at all. Look at Romans 10:9. It says,

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9 (NASB)

Saved from what? Saved from our sins. Saved from Hell. Rescued from Hell. Our sins will be erased and washed away. That crimson stain will become white as snow. This verse tells us how that happens. We have to confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord. We need to believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead. That tells you two things: one is that He died and came back to life. Did you know that if you do not believe Jesus came back to life, you are not going to Heaven, your sins are not forgiven? Do you under-

stand that you have to believe He died for your sins? There is another truth. The Bible says you have to confess Him as Lord. It is not just enough to believe some facts about Jesus Christ. Salvation requires a commitment to give yourself or your life to Jesus Christ. You place God in charge of your life. You cannot be indifferent and just give intellectual consent to some information about Jesus. The Bible tells us the demons believe in Jesus too, but they are not going to Heaven. The difference is there needs to be a commitment.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. Here is how it reads:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 (NASB)

That is the gospel. The gospel is the good news. Verse 2 says “unless you believed in vain.” Here we are told that we can believe, but belief alone will not get us to Heaven. That might surprise some people, that they can believe He died and He came back to life, and yet it is not enough to take them to Heaven. That is called vain faith; it is empty faith. Just because you say you believe does not mean you are going to Heaven. What makes the difference? How do we know if we are going to Heaven? Here is the answer. Jesus said, in John 8:24,

Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. John 8:24 (NASB)

When He says “believe that I am,” He is saying that you “have to believe I am God.” Most English Bibles put the

1. R. C. H. Lenski. 1 Peter. Commentary on the New Testament. Hendrickson Publishers. 1998. p. 32-33.

word “He” in the verse, so it reads, “I am He.” But it should just plainly say, “I am.” “Unless you believe that I am, you are going to die in your sins.” The point is you have to believe He is God. That is also the message of 1 John 4:1-2. In 1 Corinthians 15:4 we find that we have to believe He died for our sins and came back to life. Now those are the facts. That is the truth. But that is not repentance and commitment. Repentance is required and it is described in 1 John 1:8. It tells us that if we say that we have no sin, we are liars. Do you know what we have to do? We have to believe that we are sinners. Romans 3:23 says,

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23 (NASB)

All of us have sinned. We have to first believe that we are sinners. Otherwise, why would you ask to be forgiven of your sins? In Acts 2:38, Peter was preaching to a group of people and telling them the facts about Jesus, and they said, “Well, Peter, what shall we do?” Peter’s response was, “Repent.” That means if you believe that you are a sinner, you need to respond by admitting you are a sinner, are sorry for your sins, and then ask God to forgive you.

Then Romans 10:9 helps us understand that we need to ask Him to forgive our sins and acknowledge Him to be the Lord of your life. You give yourself to Him. You need to be willing to give yourself to Him and let Him take control, to take charge of your life.

I would like to close with two thoughts. The first one is a great promise. It comes from Jesus in John 11:25-26. Jesus said this,

I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. John 11:25-26 (NASB)

Do you understand what Jesus said? He said, Everybody who believes in Him, admits they are a sinner, ask to be forgiven and are repentant and give yourself to Him will never die—spiritually! The result is that you receive eternal life because He is the resurrection and the life!

A wonderful song titled “Because He Lives” was written by Bill and Gloria Gaither. Here are the lyrics,

God sent His son, they called Him Jesus.
He came to love, to heal, and forgive.
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.
Because He lives I can face tomorrow.
Because He lives all fear is gone.
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living, just because He lives.

And then one day I’ll cross the river,
I’ll fight life’s final war with pain.
And then as death gives way to victory,
I’ll see the lights of glory, and I’ll know He lives.
Because He lives I can face tomorrow.
Because He lives all fear is gone.
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living, just because He lives.

Is life worth living? Yes! Amen!

Today if you are not sure that you are going to Heaven, may I suggest that you respond to this study by writing us. We would like to help you know for sure whether or not you’re going to Heaven. Jesus did not die on a cross, and come back to life for no reason. He did it because He wanted you to know that life is worth living and so that you can spend eternity with Him.