

What if Jesus had not risen?

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, I've got a question for you this morning, and that is, what would your life have been like if Jesus hadn't risen from the dead? Think about that. If John had ended his story at the end of chapter 9, at the crucifixion, and you had never heard what happened after then, would that change anything in your life? Would your life be any different to what it is now?

That's the question I want us to consider this morning. How does the resurrection actually affect our lives on a day-to-day basis? And it's a good question to ask on Resurrection Sunday, of all Sundays, because, as Paul said, rightly so, we often spend so much time on the crucifixion, which is, of course, so central and so important, which focuses on the death of Jesus and all that it achieved, that we might easily miss the significance of his resurrection.

And I think that's something that John certainly doesn't want us to do, and that's why he writes this chapter in his Gospel, chapter 20. He writes it not only to record this key moment in human history, but also to show us why this event is so important for our lives today.

And there's a number of hints and implications that he writes into the story to help us to see why this is so significant. So this morning, I want us to consider from this passage five things that would not be true for Christians if Jesus had not risen.

So the first is, if Jesus hadn't risen, we wouldn't know where we're going. So look carefully at verse 17 with me. Mary, who loved Jesus, has just discovered that Jesus is alive.

[1 : 3 4] And, of course, a totally natural reaction for finding out that a loved one that you thought was dead is now alive. She grabs him, and she doesn't want to let go of him ever again. But then he says this to her.

Listen to what he says. From verse 17, he says, Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.

Okay, so this, I mean, poor Mary, she doesn't want to go anywhere. She doesn't want to part with Jesus ever again. But Jesus says she must. Jesus says she must go. And the reason is because there's an important message she needs to take to the rest of the disciples, who he now, notice, calls his brothers.

And he's never called them that before. And the message is this. I am ascending, notice, not just to my Father, but to my Father and to your Father. To my God and your God.

It's the first time he's spoken about God in this way to them. In other words, he's wanting them to know that he has achieved, finally, now, what he came to achieve. Through his death for their sins, he has succeeded in getting them a place in God's very family.

[2 : 4 6] And that is one of the great truths of the gospel. Jesus opens the door for human beings like you and me to come into the very family of God. And that's exactly what John said. Remember, back in chapter 1, verse 12, he said, Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Children of the creator of the universe. It was the promise of the gospel. And now Jesus is telling his disciples that he has achieved that for them. And he promised them, of course, back in chapter 14.

Remember, my Father's house has many rooms, he told them. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, so that you also may be where I am.

And here he's saying to his disciples that that has now been achieved. For the disciples, just like for Christians today, their faith in Jesus unites them to him, so that they share his destiny.

That's what he's saying. Where I go, you will now go. For those who are in me, for those who are united to me. Wherever he ends up, they will end up. That is part of what being united to Christ means.

[4 : 01] But of course, what it also means is if he stayed dead in the grave, they wouldn't have gone anywhere. They would have ended up there, staying dead in the grave as well. If Jesus is the only one who can take us into God's family, but he doesn't rise to do that, then what hope do we have to go there?

You know, no matter how much you sit on a train, if it doesn't go anywhere, neither do you. And customers of Metro Rail know this all too well. No matter how much you trust in Jesus, you see, unless he rises to new life, and himself goes to the Father, then you're going nowhere.

But he did. And it's because he did that his people can know that they will go there too one day. Secondly, if Jesus had not risen, we wouldn't know who's in charge.

So another implication of Jesus rising from the dead and returning to his Father in heaven is that we can know he's alive today, right? That's obvious. If he's risen and he didn't die again, then right now, today, he is alive.

And if he is alive today at his Father's side, he is ruling the world and our lives right now. He's alive right now.

[5 : 16] He's hearing this. Okay? He is actively ruling right now. Now, you may remember back in John 6, Jesus referred to his return to the Father after a number of people got offended by his teaching.

Remember that? Well, imagine him in 2018, where people get offended by everything and anything. But the thing is, the truth is that the gospel in every age offends people.

And it always will offend people because of Jesus' claims. Well, listen to what Jesus says to those people who are offended to him. Back in John 6, he says, Does this offend you?

Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? So, he's saying, You think you're offended now by what I'm teaching? Wait until I take my place at the right hand of the Father and become the ruler of the world.

How are you going to deal with that? Because notice, very important, when he said that in John 6, he said, Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?

[6 : 22] He uses that title for himself, the Son of Man, which is a reference to Daniel's prophecy about him. And a prophecy, this is Daniel chapter 7. You don't have to turn there, but it says this.

This is the prophecy of the Son of Man that Jesus is now claiming to fulfill. Listen to what it says. This is Daniel's prophecy. In my vision at night, I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. And so the people who are offended by the gospel now do not know what's coming, because they will all realize this truth about the Lord Jesus one day.

Jesus going back to his Father's presence means that all authority is handed to him, and he will, through the church, which he is doing right now, he will establish his kingdom, he will save his elect, and then one day he will come back to judge the world and take his people home.

[7 : 31] But none of that would have happened if he stayed in the grave. Dead men don't build kingdoms. Dead men don't rule. If Jesus had not risen, we would not know who's in charge.

We would not know who's calling the shots in this world and in our lives. But he did, and he ascended, and so we know where he is right now, and we know he's in charge, and we know that he's coming back.

And knowing these things, you know what it does? Knowing these things in our heart of hearts, believing them, the things that we professed to believe in the Apostles' Creed a little while back, you know what that does?

If we truly believe them, it gives us a peace that this world does not know. A peace that we wouldn't have if we didn't know those things. And so that's the third benefit of the resurrection of Jesus.

If he hadn't have risen, we wouldn't have true peace. Now remember back in chapter 14, Jesus promised his disciples, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you.

[8 : 35] I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid. So he promised them an amazing peace that they couldn't get anywhere else in this world.

But how does he give them this peace? How will he give them this peace that he promises them? Through his resurrection. And that's why the first thing he says when he sees them after he's risen is what?

Peace. Be with you. And what's the second thing he says? Peace. Be with you. And then eight days later, he sees them again. Verse 28. What's the first thing he says to them?

Peace. Be with you. It's like he's trying to make a point, isn't it? He's trying to make the point that because he is risen, his disciples can now finally have the peace that he promised them. The peace that surpasses all understanding.

The peace that the world cannot give you. Because now they can know these things. They can know where they're going for sure. They can know who's in charge for sure. And that knowledge, that knowledge is the only source of true peace in this world.

[9 : 41] If you know that Jesus is risen. And all Christians who believe in the resurrection are able to have that peace. Many Christians can testify to the comfort they found in hardship and grief through their knowledge of the resurrection.

That despite the brokenness of this world, Jesus is alive and eternal life is a reality for them too. And they can know that. And that is the peace that surpasses all understanding.

And that changes how we deal with suffering in life. It changes how we deal with the hardships of life. It changes how we deal with terrifying situations in life. J.R.R. Tolkien, who was a believer in the resurrection, expressed this belief in his book.

You may have heard of it, called The Lord of the Rings. And on the eve of a terrifying battle in this story, heavily outnumbered, with death almost a certainty, the hobbit Pippin shares his fear with Gandalf the wise wizard.

And he says, I didn't think it would end this way. Gandalf replies, end? No, the journey doesn't end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take.

[10 : 54] The gray rain curtain of this world rolls back and all turns to silver glass. And then you see it. What, Gandalf? See what? Pippin says. Gandalf replies, white shores and beyond a far green country under a swift sunrise.

Pippin says, well, that isn't so bad. No, no, it isn't. Gandalf replies. Now to some, that kind of hope in life after death might sound like wishful thinking.

But for a Christian, it's not. The fact that Jesus rose is a guarantee that new life is over the horizon for us who believe in him, which is the greatest comfort we could ever have.

Let it be your comfort in those battles. Let it be your comfort on those dark days. Because for a Christian, that truth is as solid and certain as the physical resurrected Jesus was solid and certain standing before his disciples that day.

Fourth reason the resurrection of Jesus is so important for us is that if Jesus didn't rise, we wouldn't have new life. Look at verse 22. And with that, he breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit.

[12 : 10] Now, first thing, we mustn't get this event confused with Pentecost, which happened 40 days later, which we read about in Acts chapter 2, when the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit, when they received the Holy Spirit in full.

You see, what's happening here is more like a promise, a physical sign Jesus is giving as a promise of what he's going to do later. He often used physical signs. Now, he uses another physical sign, this act of breathing out on them.

Like also when he, you remember when he washed their feet. That was a physical sign in the spiritual reality of them being washed of their sins when he dies for them. And so here he breathes on them as a promise that he will send them his spirit.

But more, more than just enable them to carry out the mission that he gives them, which Paul stressed earlier, was a great benefit, is a great benefit. In fact, we wouldn't be able to do the mission without the Holy Spirit given to us to aid us.

But he does more than that for Christians. This spirit will actually be a source of new inner life for Christians. Not just enable them with the opportunities and the resources to do the mission, but enable us to live a new life.

[13 : 22] Because breath from God throughout the Bible has always represented new life. Like in Genesis.

How did God put life into Adam after he created him? He breathed into his nostrils. You see, there was a sign of God being the source of life represented by this breath.

It's the same as in Ezekiel. With the valley of dry bones. And the bones stood up and what gave them life? God's breath. Well, you see, Jesus now breathes on his disciples.

And all of those Old Testament implications of God's breath will come to their minds. He's showing them that the same life-giving breath that gave life to the first humans will now be available to them.

He breathes that life-giving breath into them again to give them new life. Vital new inner life with new desires and new focuses that they've never had before.

[14 : 23] That is the life that is necessary for all Christians to have. It's what Jesus was talking about with Nicodemus. When he told them that he needed to be born again, he needed to start a new life.

And this new life starts through the breath of God being given to his people, the Holy Spirit. And here Jesus is showing that he is the one who gives that life. He is the source who breathes this new life into his people.

But of course, we can't have new life if the giver of that life is dead, can we? That doesn't make any sense. And so only because Jesus rose, only because he is alive now, can we have access to this new inner life every single day.

And he is ready and willing to give it to us every single day. And that is what he's promising his people here. And then fifth, and finally, if Jesus didn't rise, we would have nothing to tell the world.

I wonder if you noticed throughout this whole account, one thing that stood out. And that is how belief came to the disciples only when they saw evidence of the resurrection.

[15 : 32] Did you notice that? And Thomas, of course, is a prime example of this, isn't he? Doubting Thomas he's been called. But I think that is very unfair on poor Thomas.

I think Thomas gets a really bad rap. Now, at first impression, it does seem like Thomas is in the wrong to need to see in order to believe, to demand evidence in order to believe.

It seems also like Jesus is rebuking him for that. That's what we've always understood when we read that passage, right? But that's not what's going on at all. The fact is, Thomas is no different to any of the other disciples.

They all needed to see evidence of the resurrection before they believed, didn't they? So why are we giving Thomas all that flack? They all needed to. The other disciple, who's probably John, only believed when he saw the physical evidence in the tomb.

He saw and then he believed. Verse 8. Mary only believed when she turned around and saw the risen Jesus standing there. The rest of the disciples only believed and were glad, we're told in verse 20, when they what?

[16 : 34] Saw the Lord. See, the point is, the point that John's making is for all of them, seeing is believing. They needed to see in order to believe, in order for their faith to be genuine, for their faith to be real.

And Thomas is no different. The only reason he didn't believe at first was he wasn't there to see with the rest of them. He was probably out at the shops buying some food for them or whatever. Poor guy. And that's the point that John's making.

And he uses the story of Thomas to make that point that seeing is vital for believing. In other words, Christian faith is not blind faith. Christian faith was never meant to be blind faith.

Christian faith is a faith that's based on evidence, solid evidence. Christian faith is not blind faith. Christian faith is a faith that's based on evidence, solid faith that's based on evidence. Okay, but if that's true, then why does Jesus say what he says to Thomas in verse 29?

It does seem like a rebuke, doesn't it? Well, let's read it again. Verse 29. Then Jesus told him, Because you have seen me, you have believed.

[17 : 39] Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Now, what does he mean by that? well we find out when we read the next verse verse 30 jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book but these are written so that you may believe that jesus is the messiah the son of god and that by believing you may have life in his name now um we lose a bit in our english translations of the bible and in this verse in the original text verse 30 starts with the word therefore which is often left untranslated but it's a vital word because it links verse 29 with verse 30 and so it's basically saying this it's saying the reason that future generations can be blessed in believing even though they don't see is because their faith is based on what the apostles did see and wrote down for us that's what it's saying and so seeing is still vital for believing but it's because that it's because they saw that we can believe today seeing is always vital for believing the christian faith is not a blind faith but it's the disciples seeing that is the basis for our belief because they are eyewitnesses to it and we can have true belief because of their eyewitness testimony just like a court in a courtroom today a court will believe a valid eyewitness testimony especially if there are more than one eyewitnesses to the same event and if you're there in the courtroom you can have real belief in the events that happened even if you weren't there and didn't see them yourself because of those eyewitnesses can't you that's that's how the court system works eyewitness testimony that is valid is the basis of truly believing things that happened well it's the same for the eyewitness accounts of the apostles we and others can have real belief in the resurrection because of what they saw but of course what that means is that just as vital as it was for them to see the risen jesus in order to believe as vital is it for people today to hear their testimony of what they saw for those people to believe and that's why john says he wrote all of this down so that we can have that testimony to share with others because without this testimony of the resurrection people would not be able to believe and so would not be able to have life that's how important it is for people to be convinced that the resurrection actually happened the resurrection you see is part and parcel of the gospel the gospel doesn't end at the death of jesus that is its climax but the resurrection is just as important as we communicate the good news of jesus if we're not including the resurrection if we're not telling our friends and neighbors that jesus actually rose from the dead and showing people what that means for our lives well then we have nothing important to say and we may as well keep quiet but jesus did rise and that's why we do have something to say because he rose christians hold the single most important message this world has ever heard you hold the single most important message this world has ever heard a message which when you share john says will literally give people eternal life the message of the resurrection of jesus christ is the most powerful weapon that we have against all the forces of darkness and death and sin in this world and that is why we need to devote ourselves as christians to sharing that message at every opportunity so that we can continue the message the mission that jesus began to bring people into the family of god and so he says at the end jesus says peace be with you as the father has sent me

i'm sending you let's pray for help as we carry out that task yes lord jesus thank you for this great assurance that you have given us that you specifically appeared physically to your apostles so that we can have solid eyewitness testimony that you rose from the dead thank you lord for the ways that that changes our lives lord for what a life changing world changing truth that the resurrection is help us lord to live our lives every day in light of it to live according to that new life you give your people and lord help us to be so excited by the resurrection that we're celebrating today that we will not be able to keep quiet about it help us to testify to others so that they might come to believe and have life in believing pray this all in jesus name amen