

Easter Sunday

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[0 : 0 0] All right, we're going to spend some time in the Bible now, God's Word, we're going to hear from Him, because this is really not about us today, it's about God and what God wants us to hear.

Now on the Easter weekend, you've probably been before, if you're at church now, you've probably been to church before, on Easter, and at the Easter weekend, pastors will often give sermons that are especially aimed at those who don't follow Jesus, who aren't Christians yet, and the reason they do that is because it's one of the few times non-Christians come to church, so they don't feel guilty about having a long weekend.

And so typically pastors will take advantage of that and preach about the resurrection and explain what happened and why you should believe it. Thing is, this morning, you've already heard what happened in the narrative and the songs.

If you were listening, you've heard everything you need to know. I don't need to spend 30 minutes explaining the resurrection to you. It's pretty simple. Jesus rose from the dead.

I mean, it doesn't get more simple than that. You either believe that or you don't. That's what it comes down to. You either believe that Jesus rose bodily from the dead or you don't. Now if you don't, it is worth asking yourself, why not?

[1 : 1 7] We have all the evidence we need for it. If you're not sure, then there's a book that we have in our book table that's on a discounted price called Your Verdict on the Empty Tomb. And this book is designed to give you at least a start of looking at the evidence we have for the resurrection, that it really happened.

And so I would encourage you to look at that. If you don't believe the resurrection happened, if you think it's just a myth or traditional but it's not real, then do take a look at the evidence. As a Christian, I can tell you we have all the evidence we need.

You just need to look at it. And remember something that German theologian Wolfhard Pannenberg says. He says the evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things.

First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live. And that may be the reason you don't want to look into it.

But I encourage you to do so for your own sake. And we have the resources available. And I would be also, if you don't like reading, I would be glad to talk with anyone who wants to investigate this more.

[2 : 2 8] Because let me tell you, this is the trump card of Christianity. All of Christianity, everything we believe and do rests on this one historical fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

Paul says, if he didn't, then we're still in our sins and everything is worthless and we may as well just eat and drink and die. But if Jesus rose from the dead, that changes everything.

And so that's essentially all I really want to say to those of you who don't yet believe in the resurrection. Do your homework. Investigate it. It's the best use of your time.

But for now, I want to talk mainly to those of you who do believe that the resurrection happened. I'm hoping it will still be useful to those of you who are just not Christians but popping your head in and coming here to enjoy and appreciate Easter.

I'm hoping this talk will be useful for you too. Because this morning, I want to talk about the power of the resurrection. The power of the resurrection. And how it does, as Pannenberg said in that quote, how it does change the way people live when they believe it.

[3 : 33] Because you remember, if you were here on Friday, I spoke about the power of the cross. And we looked at how the cross has real power. More powerful than anything that humans could do.

Because it has the power to redirect God's anger away from us and God's justice away from us and on to Jesus. The power to change the cosmic course of events.

The power to make us right with God. And the power to change us as well. So you'll remember the power of the cross if you were here on Friday. Well, today I want to talk about the power of the resurrection.

Because it's something that is often spoken of in Scripture. Resurrection power. But it means far more than we think it means. Because we tend to think it's referring to, well, the powerful influence that knowing this historical fact has on the way I think and live.

And, of course, the historical fact alone does have a powerful influence. If you believe, just take a second, if you really believe that someone in our world was medically, certifiably dead and came to life again, that has to change the way you think about life and death, doesn't it?

[4 : 46] And so, just that historical fact does change the way we think. But, when the Bible talks about the power of the resurrection, it's actually talking about more than just the effect it has on my thinking.

It's talking about real, actual power that is inside believers because of the resurrection that they didn't have before they believed.

Power that is inside believers now. I know it sounds like some kind of Marvel movie, people with special powers. But I want to tell you, and boys and girls, listen carefully to this.

The Bible teaches us that Christians have a special power. But the difference with superhero movies is that it's not their power. It's not something to do with them.

It is God's power, but it is in them and it is working in them. That's what the Bible says. So, for example, listen to this passage in Romans 8. It says this, Even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

[5 : 49] And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead, look at this, is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you.

So, Paul, the writer of Romans, who is a mouthpiece of God, he's one of the instruments that God has given of revelation of this truth, teaches that the Spirit is living now in believers.

God's Spirit comes to live in those who believe in Jesus. Believing is not just a mental exercise. Believing is a spiritual exercise. But here's the amazing thing it also says in this passage.

It says that Spirit that lives in believers is the very same Spirit whose power caused Jesus to come back from the dead. That's amazing.

So, think about this for a second. What is the difference between a dead body and a living body? On a cellular level, they're pretty much exactly the same. Sure, the dead body will start to deteriorate and decay.

[6 : 46] But after a person dies, right away, their body, physically, on a chemical level, is no different to what it was a minute ago when they were alive.

But we know there's a big difference. But what is that difference? What is the difference? Doctors can't tell you. You know, why can't you just bring a dead body back to life by pumping the heart again?

You know, why can't you just say, Ah, Granny's dead again. Just pump her heart a few times. She'll come around. Why doesn't that work? Well, it's because when someone dies, there's something that's gone, isn't there?

And it's not coming back. We know that. When someone dies, you don't go, Oh, well, you know, they're dead now. But you never know. They might come around. No, you know they're gone.

Even though their body hasn't changed that much. Yes, it's stopped working. But something is missing and isn't coming back. What is that?

[7 : 42] What is it inside you that is keeping you alive? You'll say, okay, it's my heart that's beating and pumping blood to my brain. That's what's keeping me alive. But what causes your heart to beat?

Okay, well, that's the electrical signals that are in my brain. Oh, that's interesting. Your heart is keeping your brain alive, but your brain is keeping your heart alive. I wonder what started that whole process.

What causes the electrical signals to fire in your brain? What is it? You see, God designed this amazing machine. But just the physical machine isn't enough.

Just like a car without fuel isn't enough. You can have the most expensive car. You can buy a Ferrari, a Lamborghini. It could be beautiful and like running perfectly.

But if you don't put fuel in that car, it's going nowhere. So a car without fuel is useless. It isn't enough. Your body needs something more to be alive.

[8 : 44] And that something more is what the Bible calls spirit. The Hebrew word in the Old Testament is ruach. And it literally means breath, breath of life.

It's the same thing God breathed into Adam after he created his body to make him alive. So you'll remember if you read Genesis, God created Adam, but he still wasn't alive. God had to breathe ruach into him to make him alive, to start the whole process of his brain firing and his heart beating.

And it's what we lose when we die. The Bible says our ruach departs from us. But it's also what caused Jesus to come alive again on Easter Sunday.

God's own ruach, God's own spirit. And that spirit, God's spirit, his own life, when given to a human being, is hugely powerful.

It's what caused the heart in Jesus' corpse to start beating again. It's what re-fired the electrical signals in his brain and caused his lungs to inhale and caused Jesus to open his eyes.

[9 : 49] And no amount of human power is able to do that. Am I right? No amount of our science or our technology can bring a corpse back to life again.

That is a hugely powerful thing. And it's the power of God's spirit that did it. And that very same power, God says, is now in believers.

Here and now in this world, not just one day after they die, but it is here now. It is what is necessary to bring them back to life, like it did with Jesus. But that power has already arrived in believers.

And that is a hugely transforming idea. It's the great truth that the Bible teaches to Christians. Believers already have started their resurrection lives here and now.

Not only that there is a new world coming. That's what the Bible teaches. A new world is coming without sin and death. Because we know, don't we, no matter what belief you come from, you know this world is not how it's meant to be.

[10 : 52] This world is not how it's meant to be. Which is interesting because this is the only world you've ever known and yet you have an idea of something that's meant to be and it's not this. And we don't even need the Bible to tell us that. We don't need the Bible to tell us this world is not how it's meant to be.

I think we would all agree with that. But we do need the Bible to tell us that this is not all there is. This is not the end. God has a new world planned. We're told.

But he hasn't brought it yet because he wants to give you a chance to live in it one day. But you can't live in a perfect new world unless your sins are dealt with first.

Because they disqualify you from a perfect world. If God allowed us as we were now to let, you know, into his perfect world, it would just be the same as this world.

Because actually the problem of the world is not out there. It's in here, by the way. The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. It's a pithy phrase, but it's true. And so unless your sins are dealt with first, you can't be part of the world as it's meant to be, which God has planned.

[11 : 55] And that's why Jesus came to die for your sins. That's the whole point. So that you can believe and be forgiven. And so believers know that they are going to live in a new world one day.

And they're going to have new life in a new world. A good life. A life of holiness and love and goodwill towards our neighbors where we perfectly love God and love one another.

A blissful world like we all hope this world to be and never is. But like we were meant to live. That's how we will live. And believers know that. But here's what many Christians fail to realize.

That we are able to start living that life already while we are still living this life. Because the power to live that life, God's Holy Spirit, is already in us.

Now, we'll never live it perfectly here. We still have our body of death and our tendencies of sin dragging us down. And that's why we need to come back, keep coming back to the cross and keep finding forgiveness in Christ for our sins.

[13 : 00] Because he died not only for the sins you've committed in the past, but all the ones you're going to commit in the future if you're a believer. And you can keep coming and repenting of his sins. Not that you're encouraged to carry on sinning because you can always just find forgiveness.

In fact, that spirit in you will cause you to hate sin. It will cause you to not want to continue to sin because that new life has already started. But we'll never live it perfectly in this life.

Because we're still living the end of this life. And so while that's true, while it's true that we'll never live it perfectly in this life, it's also true that God's Spirit causes a Christian to start living their new life now.

The life that they will live in that world, even now while they're still living in this world, they get to start living this new life. Christians start living now.

Now you may be thinking, that's rubbish. That's rubbish. I know Christians who believe in Jesus, but they're not that different to me. I've got Christians at work who talk about Jesus, but they're still living the same way.

[14 : 05] They're not living different lives like you say. Maybe you're right. On the surface, maybe they're not living different lives. And that might be one of two reasons.

One, because they're not actually believers. You do get fake Christians. Not in persecuted countries, by the way. So in persecuted countries, they aren't fake Christians.

But in countries where, thankfully, we have freedom of speech, well, we still do. I don't know how long that'll last when you look at Australian rugby players and things like that. But for now, we still have freedom of speech.

And so people can be fake Christians, cultural Christians. But the second reason that the Christians you know might not be displaying a new life, and this is more likely, is that they don't yet know or they haven't yet tapped into the new life inside them.

And that is possible. Because listen to what Paul says to the Ephesian Christians, for example. The verse will be behind me. He says, I pray that you may know God's incomparably great power for us who believe.

[15 : 12] That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead. And so what he's saying, that resurrection power that God has given to the Ephesian Christians to live their new life, Paul prays that they actually know and experience it.

Which implies, maybe they don't yet. They can be Christians and still not know and experience this resurrection power. He says a similar thing about himself in Philippians.

Have a look. He says, I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

I actually love the original Greek of that verse 11, the resurrection of the dead. Literally it says, to be raised from the corpses. It's very physical, very graphic, and very true.

But the point is that even though Paul knows that God has given him resurrection power in the Holy Spirit, he still longs to know and experience that power more. You see, that's what he's saying here.

[16 : 11] He wants to know it more, that resurrection power. Now, if Paul wasn't, Paul, right, he saw Jesus face to face. He was a truly transformed Christian.

But if he wasn't fully experiencing that power yet, how much more do we still, ordinary Christians, need to know and experience it? So the point I'm trying to make, and this is very important here on Resurrection Sunday, that God has given real power to Christians through his Spirit to live a new kind of life now in this world, but many may not even know it yet or experience it in any real way.

And I've come across that Christians who believe, but they're not living out and experiencing resurrection power in their life yet. And so Paul prays in Ephesians.

He prays that they will know it, and he wants more himself to know that resurrection power, and we should too. And so the point is, this new life that God has put in believers might be there, but it might be asleep.

Kids, boys and girls, when your dad's asleep, he's not very useful, is he? He doesn't play with you. He doesn't help mom with the dishes. He doesn't mow the lawn.

[17 : 22] He has to be awake to be useful, doesn't he? But that doesn't mean you don't have a dad just because he's asleep. It doesn't mean he's not there, right, when he's asleep. Well, in the same way, even if a believer's new life that God has given them is not apparent, it doesn't mean it's not there.

And so take heart. If you're a believer, you have that power available to you if you believe in these events that we've been celebrating over the last few days.

If you believe in those, God has given you that power. In fact, it's only because of God that you can believe that because faith itself is a gift. And you have that power available to you, in you, even if you don't know it.

But you might need to wake it up. And I think many Christians, and I think many Christians sitting here who believe still need to wake up that power, still need to wake up what's inside them.

Now, don't get me wrong. It's not that the Holy Spirit is asleep and you've got to wake up the Holy Spirit. In fact, it's the other way around. You're the sleeping one in this illustration, and the Holy Spirit wakes you up. But you still have a responsibility then to get out of bed and put on your new clothes and start living your new life.

[18 : 36] Or to use another illustration, think of a plant. Do you have a plant on your kitchen windowsill? But if you don't water it, what happens? It wilts.

It sags. It dies. It gets all brown. And it might look dead if you neglect it. But what happens when you pour water on it for a couple of days? It comes back to life, you know?

It might look dead, but it might still have life in it. And all it needs is a bit of watering. In fact, that's the same way you can get Dad out of bed. But the idea with the plant is that the life is there, even if you can't see it, right?

Even if it looks dead, the life is still in it. It just needs watering. So what is the way we water the resurrection life that God has given us if we're Christians? What is the way that we wake it up?

That's a very important question, isn't it? If you're a Christian, if you're a believer, and you have resurrection life in you through the Holy Spirit, what is the way that you water that life, that you cause that life to spring up?

[19 : 40] What can you do? Well, it's through something that theologians call the means of grace. The instruments and tools that God uses and gives us to nurture new life in us.

And there are three that, throughout church history, have been recognized. Three means of grace. Three things God has given us to water that new life in us. And that is prayer, the sacraments, and preaching of the Word.

Basically, all the stuff we do here at church on a Sunday. And that's why we do those things. We haven't decided, well, what should we do at church? Let's think of some fun stuff to do on a Sunday morning.

It is important work we do at church. We tap into the instruments God has given us to nurture that spiritual life in us as Christians. And so notice, for example, in Ephesians, Paul is not just saying he wants the Christians there to experience resurrection power.

He is praying that they would. He is using one of those tools, one of those means of grace that God has given. And so if you're a believer, make sure you are using the means of grace that God has given to water the life inside you.

[20 : 47] So that it will grow and occupy a bigger and bigger part of your life. I think there are many, as I've said before, there are many Christians who genuinely believe that their resurrection life is wilted.

It's not active because they're not tapping into what God has made available in the church for their nourishment. Right? Many people, you know, will say to me, I don't have to go to church.

I like my lion on a Sunday morning. Sure, you don't have to go to church to be saved. But you don't have to eat either. But it's probably a good idea. Right?

So it's the same way. This is nourishment. This is the means of grace and the means by which God nourishes his people. But I also want to point out before we finish, a very important thing Paul says is needed if we're going to live our resurrection lives.

And this is an unexpected one. But he says it in Philippians. What we need to live our resurrection lives is we need to lose.

[21 : 51] You need to be a loser to live the resurrected life. Let me explain what I mean. Look at what else he says in that passage from Philippians, from verse 7. You may have noticed that our rubbish bin has that verse on the side.

Outside. Outside. But Paul is talking here about who he was before he became a Christian. And who he was, he was quite the man. He was a very high-ranking Jewish official and he was very religious.

But he had to give that all up, he says. He had to lose his position and his privileges in order to gain Christ. His status and his religion and all his religious qualifications and the confidence he had in them, he had to lose.

And he says he could only know Christ and the power of his resurrection once he had lost those things. And that's how the Christian life starts.

When you're a loser. You can't be a Christian unless you're a loser. You see, that power comes into a person's life when they lose their confidence in other things to save them.

[23 : 18] And they realize that they have no power in and of themselves. They are losers. We are losers. We've already lost life by sinning and taking the life that God has given us and using it for what we want rather than what he wants.

And ignoring God and the will that he's made. We are losers. But once we realize that and we lose our confidence in whatever it was that we think is going to save us and we turn around and follow Jesus, that's how the Christian life starts.

But it requires loss. Not just of what we trusted before but often of lifestyles and habits that are not consistent with the life that God is calling us to live. The resurrection life.

I mean, if you're a Christian and there are things and habits and patterns in your life, things that you're doing, that you're comfortable with, and yet you know these are not things that you will be doing in the new world, then they're probably things that you should stop doing now.

Probably one of the things you should lose in preparation for what's to come. It costs us, you see, to follow Jesus and live a new life. Jesus himself put it this way. He said, whoever loses his life for me in the gospel will save it.

[24 : 25] Now, he didn't mean go and kill yourself. That wouldn't be the best thing to do on Resurrection Sunday, by the way. What he meant by losing his life for me is following him, but that requires loss of whatever you were chasing after and following before.

You need to learn how to be a loser of things in this world if you're going to live the life of the world to come. But it's worth it. Because when you have that life in you, that same life that empowers you to live more like Jesus and to love God and people and to do the good works God has prepared for you to do, then you can know that same power which is enabling you to do those things will raise your dead body one day like it did for the body of Jesus.

One day, in the future, when your corpse is lying in the ground, if now you are a believer and you have the Spirit inside you, one day, when your corpse is in the ground, Jesus is going to come back and he's going to issue a loud command with his archangels and his servants and the whole world is going to see.

And his voice is going to be heard around the world, but your corpse is lying in the ground. When his voice is heard around the world, your heart's going to start beating again.

Electrical signals in your brain will re-fire and your lungs will be filled with air and your eyes will open and somehow you'll come out of the ground. I don't know how. Paul doesn't even know how. Look what he says in verse 11.

[26 : 04] So that somehow I'm going to attain resurrection from the dead. Somehow I'm going to rise from the corpses. He doesn't know the mechanics of that, but he knows it's going to happen. Why? Because it happened on Easter Sunday.

The Bible says the graves will open and the dead will come out and we know that's going to happen because of the events of Easter. It has already happened in history. And you can know it's going to happen for you if you believe that and have been baptized and so have that resurrection power within you now.

Now I want to end by saying this and then we're going to have some more music and then we're going to depart and enjoy some fellowship and refreshments in the hall.

But I want to end by saying this. There are probably, you are probably one of three types of people sitting here this morning. One, the first type of person, you don't believe what happened at Easter.

Now if that's the case, I would, as I said, I would recommend you to ask yourself why you don't believe that. Do you have any valid reasons not to believe that? I mean you believe in other historical events, why not this one?

[27 : 09] It's a good question to ask yourself. So I would recommend just take some time and investigate it. Get this book from the book table, discounted price. It's worth a read. It's a small book as well. You can read it this afternoon.

But also a great way to investigate the resurrection and the other primary teachings of the Bible is to come to the I Believe course which we're starting next month. I mentioned this on Friday and I want to invite you to come to that.

You've probably still got a flyer in your notice that you received this morning on that. It's a very special course for starting. And it's open to anyone. That's the thing. It's not just for Christians. In fact, primarily it's not for Christians.

But Christians of course can come along to relearn and to learn maybe some of the stuff they didn't learn. And what's great about it is you can ask any questions you want. And you're not going to be forced to believe anything.

Don't think that you're going to be told what to believe. This is a place, I'll use a modern, it's a safe space for you. It's a safe space for you to explore and you won't be judged for whatever beliefs you hold.

[28 : 13] So that's what I want to recommend to you. If you don't believe what happened at Easter, just spend some time exploring it. Look at the evidence. Secondly, there's a second type of person here this morning that you do believe this.

You can't, if you ask yourself honestly whether you believe this or not, you do actually believe it happened. But you're not yet a Christian. You haven't been baptized into God's church.

Well, that's easy. If you believe, you must get baptized as soon as you can. Because that is one of the means of grace that God uses to wake up that resurrection life in you.

So don't delay. Come to me and we can schedule it in. Or you're the third type of person sitting here this morning, which is you are a Christian, but either you don't see evidence of this new life in you, or you do see some but you want to see more.

If that is you this morning, then I want to tell you, use the means of grace that God has given. The word and prayer and the sacraments. And trust that God will grow and nurture that life in you.

[29 : 16] And that is what church is here for, for you. Don't neglect the work we're doing here. To give you those means of grace. And so trust that God will grow that life, that resurrection life that is already in you because you believe and have been baptized.

And trust that he will do that as you listen to his voice, as you commune with him, and as you follow his commands. And right now I'm going to use one of those means of grace to pray for us.

To ask for God's help. Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you for life. We thank you that you are the source of ruach. That you are the source of what makes dead bodies alive.

What gives us life when we're born. And what will give believers life one day when they're raised like Jesus was. We thank you that you are the God of life. And that you have real life, eternal life planned for us.

That this is not the end. Lord, we thank you that we can remember that on Resurrection Sunday. We thank you also that you have given us means. You have given us ways to nurture and nourish the life in us by your Holy Spirit through prayer and the sacraments and the word that you've given us that is preached.

[30 : 29] And so we ask, Lord, that you would help us to respond to what we've heard this morning. And I pray for those who don't believe in the resurrection. That you would just cause them to direct them to evidence and help them to research this event for themselves.

I also pray for those who have not yet been baptized but do believe it. Lord, would you bring them to that point of coming into your people, your covenant people.

And I pray for those who are Christians and want to see like Paul did, like the Ephesians did, want to see more of this resurrection life. That you would, in the coming weeks and months as we gather regularly at church, you would use what we do here to grow and nurture and nourish our resurrection life.

So that we would live as your people and do the good works that you've prepared in advance for us to do. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.