

THE RESSURRECTION

CHRIST HAS RISEN! Grab your Bibles and open them to **1 Corinthians 15**. Good Morning and Happy Easter. I was talking with the other 3strand pastors this week about how difficult it is to preach Easter, and I made some brilliant comment about making sure that Jesus resurrection is not just a once time celebration, and the reply was: well how many times do you think he rose from the dead. So I got put in my place, but the point I was trying to make is that this event is not something to just remember at Easter.

As a church we make the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ a focus of our worship each and every week. **We do this, not because we are morbid, or edgy, but because we understand that the gospel, the life and work of Jesus Christ, is the central tenant of the faith.** Before we can start talking about the details of what our new life looks like, what eternity holds, or what we are going to do with the sin in our lives, we must first grab hold of the truth that:

Jesus Christ died as a substitute for our sin. God's punishment was transferred from us to Him. He carried that weight of all of our wrongs upon His shoulders. They were nailed to the cross with Him. In His death, by His blood, our disgrace has been washed away.

But, you may say, that all happened on Friday. What is the big deal with the resurrection? Well, you aren't the first one to ask this question. Paul addressed this in his first letter to Corinth. **15.12-26**

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that 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 futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 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. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Paul says: without EASTER, we have nothing. If you take away the fact that Jesus got up from the grave, you give up the Christian faith. This is not a minor issue. BUT how does our faith rest on the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ? Paul gives us three implications:

1. Jesus resurrection opens the door to the resurrection of His people.

When we receive the gift of grace, the Bible tells us that we are reborn. This rebirth is a miraculous resurrection, as our old self is killed off and replaced with the life of the Spirit. The Bible refers to this as the crucifixion of our old self, leading to the raising of our new self, the rebirth, the resurrection. **Colossians 2.12** makes this connection between Jesus resurrection and our own clear:

having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Jesus resurrection was a picture of what God would do for His people. Just as God gave new life to the dead body of Jesus, so He will instill new life into His people. **The new life that we receive now is a precursor of what is to come.** There will be a day coming when we experience the completion of our new life. When this earthly body dies, we will be resurrected into glorified bodies, to live for eternity with Jesus. **1 Peter 1.3** connects this great hope to the reality of Jesus resurrection:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We have hope because he lives. We know what God will raise us up in the same way that He brought Jesus back from death.

2. Jesus resurrection is a revelation of His victory.

The same power that raised Jesus up on Easter morning is the power that makes us new. In the crucifixion, Jesus showed His humility. He went to the cross freely, like a lamb led to slaughter, allowing Himself to be mistreated, falsely charged, and murdered. He allowed this to happen because He was the only sacrifice that could pay for sin. He allowed this because He loved us. So that even in His humility we see strength. In His greatest moment of weakness displays His power; the power to follow through on the ultimate humiliation in order to bring about ultimate glory.

This ultimate glory is shown in the resurrection. The victory over sin at the cross is punctuated by His victory over death at the resurrection. By getting up from death, Jesus showed that he was not bound by the limitations that we are. The resurrection is a declaration that Jesus has overcome the power of sin's curse. **In Genesis 3, we see that death was a result of sin entering the world.** Jesus death was necessary to overcome it, but once the price had been paid and victory had been achieved, then Jesus could show what this victory means. Death no longer holds power. Our joy today is in the fact that we get to share in this victory. **1 John 5.4-5** tells us:

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Which leads us to the final implication of the resurrection that Paul lays out:

3. Jesus resurrection is a seal of His divinity.

It proves once and for all that HE IS GOD. The resurrection of Jesus is the last in a list of prophecies that He had fulfilled. The prophecies told of His family line, the town He would be born in, where He would grow up, His ministry, His death...and of His resurrection. Isaiah 53, a chapter dedicated to the coming Messiah tells us:

*Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; 10a*

In other words, this is how we will know that this is the one that God promised. This is how we are assured that this is not just another man, not just a prophet, not just a teacher; we know He is God because HE IS ALIVE.

THE CREED AND CONFUSION

Which brings us to the Nicene Creed. We have been looking at the historical creeds as a way to view our faith through the lens of history. Last week we talked about the Apostles creed as a statement of faith to rally around, today we will see how the creeds are a defense of our faith

against heresy, they protect us from false belief about Jesus Christ. The Nicene Creed exists specifically to protect the power of the resurrection.

For the first few hundred years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity was under persecution. They met in hiding, spoke in codes, and if caught, were often tortured and killed for their faith. Even with all of the danger, belief in Jesus Christ spread. With the help of the Apostle's creed, the truth of Jesus was passed from one person to another until it had traveled far and wide. The power of the truth (and the Holy Spirit) was greater than any suppressing power that humans could create.

Then came one of the huge turning points of Church history in 312 AD. Constantine, the leader of the Roman army prepared for battle, he looked up in the sky and saw the sign of the cross with the words, IN THIS SIGN YOU WILL CONQUER. He won the battle, was made Augustus, or unrivaled emperor, and legalized Christianity. **No longer did Christianity need to fight for their lives. They now had a new fight; the fight for clarity.**

In all the years that Christianity had been under the danger of death, false teaching arose. Because it was all underground, there wasn't the chance to crush some of these false teachings right away. Constantine, in his desire for a unified church, called together a council of Christian leaders. He invited 1800 bishops (local church leaders) to come to a council to discuss and clarify the truth of Jesus Christ.

In 325 they gathered at the council of Nicea. While not all 1800 could attend, many of them did, and each with a few others in tow, you could imagine the chaos of the scene [like British Parliament]. I have seen the difficulty of 3 or 4 pastors in a room to come to a consensus, I cannot imagine hundreds. They delegated for 7 weeks. While they made quite a few decisions in that time, including the date of Easter, the majority of their time was spent on one question: IF JESUS WAS A MAN, THEN HOW COULD HE ALSO BE GOD?

The debate was centered on two men from Alexandria: Arius and Athanasius.

Arius was the more popular leader. He was tall, and eloquent and had a great following. He was also a heretic. He taught that there was no way that Jesus could be both God and man. That was an impossible contradiction. To make sense of it, he taught that Jesus was created by God. In order to save the world, God created the man, Jesus Christ, to accomplish salvation. The reason why Arius was such a threat was because of the fiery nature of his disciples. They would attack anyone who spoke out against him. There are stories of them marching down the streets chanting: THERE WAS ONCE WHEN HE WAS NOT.

Athanasius was much more unassuming. He was poor. And his appearance led one man to write about him: 'not even a man, but a common little dwarf.' But what Athanasius had on his side was truth. He was there to declare the glory of the Incarnation, God in the flesh.

So as these men came together with all of these other leaders. They came together to craft a statement that expressed, in God's own words, the truth of who He is. On the discussion of who is Jesus, they devised this statement:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,

of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.

It seems that the authors of the creed belabor the point here a bit. They make all of these little quips that seem to repeat rather than move the statement along. But this has all been placed here to clarify exactly who Jesus is:

ETERNALLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER

This word begotten is a biblical word and the one that the Arians had capitalized on trying to break down the fact that Jesus was God. **They took begotten to mean that Jesus was created by God. But begotten means from/of.** When the Bible uses this word it is describing the nature of Jesus as very different than us who are adopted sons and daughters of God. Jesus is begotten, not made. He is one with God. He is God.

This is the point at which our brains start to hurt as we try to fully connect the dots of how this works. In order to make sense of the nature of Jesus, we are forced to either accept something that we cannot fully comprehend, or to change God into something that we can rationally accept. And this really was the fight between Arius and Athanasius: how do we know who Jesus is?

Arius began with his own understanding. He started with the reality that he knew. One thing can not be two things at the same time. Athanasius lived by the belief that: all discussion of God, including terms used, *must proceed from an appropriate sense of the divine nature*. In other words, we need to let God be God. Our understanding of God comes from him alone. How do we know that Jesus is God? How do we know that the resurrection really happened? THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO.

If you are not a believer, then this will sound foolishly simplistic to you. But if you have heard the voice of God speak through His Word, then there is no other option. When we try to adapt God to our own thinking we mess it up. At times God is poetic, and He is poetic specifically because our minds cannot handle the fullness of the God we serve. In John 1, we see the same poetic language used that is repeated in the Nicene Creed. It reads:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

God of God. He was with God, He was God, He always has been. This is our description of Jesus. While there is a distinction made between the Father and the Son, they are of the same essence. They are one. This means the man on the cross, suffering for the sake of the world was not just a man sent by God, it was God Himself. It had to be. He was the only acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the world. Our understanding of Jesus as God is rooted in the redemption. Only God would have been enough. Only a sacrifice so great could produce a grace so complete.

The false view of the Arians rendered salvation impossible. It creates a good example, moral lesson, but that's all.

Light of Light. John 1 describes Jesus as the Light of men. Athanasius used this idea of light to explain the relationship of the father and son. He said:

Just as the sun is inseparable from its rays (to be the sun is to shed light) to be the Father is to possess the Son.

You can't distinguish the two from one another. The sun and sunshine are different, but they're not. **John 1** gives the analogy of the sun this way:

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he [Jesus] has made him known.

It is through Jesus that we know God. In the same way that we know the sun from its light, the light of God has shown into the world through Jesus. So when we look at Jesus, we see God. In the words of Athanasius: 'The Son is everything the Father is, except Father.' Jesus is our picture of God.

The Nicene creed was not written to sell books or make a celebrity out of its authors. It was written to make much of its topic. These men came together because they believed that the greatest picture of God that we are afforded is in our risen savior Jesus Christ. They worked hard to define, defend, and then defer to the Bible for a complete picture of the God they worshipped. We have been gifted their hard work. The clarity that they fought for on the nature of Jesus has helped to make God visible for us.

What does the Jesus of Easter reveal to us about God?

We see the love of God.

God's love is on display today. Jesus came down from His heavenly throne to live on this earth. He suffered. He hurt. He was betrayed. He was murdered. WHY? Love. What held Jesus Christ to the cross was not the power of men, or nails, or fatigue. It was His love for His people. He loves you with a love that is more pure than anything you have ever experienced before. It is not the circumstantial love of movies, or the conditional love of friends. This is pure, from the source LOVE. The kind of love where God would give up everything to bring you back to Himself.

We see the grace of God.

We deserve death; we get life. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ we receive a resurrection to a new life; a life that no longer begins and ends with ourselves. Our worthiness is not longer found in us. We are free to cast off the shame, fear, anger, bitterness, pride, the junk that fills us up and pollutes our lives. They have died with Jesus Christ. But, I still struggle with all that stuff. BUT IT HAS NO POWER. When shame creeps up, remember the grace of God and recognize that your sin has been paid. When pride overwhelms you, you can remember Jesus on the cross and be humbled. When fear is present, remember whose you are.

We see the power of God.

Victory is His. Sin, defeated. Death, defeated. Satan, defeated. Jesus has shown us firsthand His power. He gave Himself the disadvantage of the human condition and still came out on top. In the completion of His plan we see His power over large and small. Every detail amazingly worked out to bring forth His glory and our salvation!

We see the sovereignty of God.

This points to His sovereignty, His complete and utter control over every aspect of His creation. We can live in peace because we know our king is alive. He is in control of every aspect of our lives. In the same way that he worked forth the plan of History to its pinnacle at the cross. In the same way that He used the most horribly tragic event that we could imagine to supply the greatest joy we could ever experience. We know He is in control right now. When things are good. Our God reigns. When things are bad. Our God reigns. He is alive and working towards the finale, when he returns. As the creed puts it:

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

Jesus is alive. Because He is alive we have hope. We are able to live our lives on this earth with eternity in mind. Eternity that he purchased for us. Eternity that He is guarding for us. Eternity with Him. Easter reminds us that because of His death and resurrection there is a life beyond the cares and concerns of this world. There is a world to come. The only question is: will you be part of it? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will share with Him in the life to come.

BELIEVE THAT THE DEATH AND RESSURECTION OF JESUS CHRIST IS SUFFICIENT. IT IS ENOUGH.

I will end with the end of the creed:

We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

We live because He lives. Long live our king!