

The Resurrection

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Date: 17 April 2022

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[0 : 00] Okay, for a little while we're going to look at this passage this morning on the resurrection, and then we'll sing together and then we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper, which seems truly appropriate today as well.

So I know there's got a lot of vistas today and maybe quite a lot of vistas who are not from Edinburgh, so this illustration I'm having at the beginning might not mean so much to you. I'm going to read Rebus. Ian Rankin is an Edinburgh writer and he writes crime novels and he bases them in Edinburgh and of course his main character is Inspector Rebus and I love him and I love reading these novels because I really feel involved in them.

You know when I read about Arden Street or I read about Spotterswood Street or St Leonard's Police Station, not that I know that in great detail, of course, but I feel you know that when I pass these particular streets or police stations or iconic parts of the city, and I feel really involved because I know them so much and it triggers the power of my imagination as I read the book and it makes it so that when I actually pass these areas and immediately think of Rebus or I think of the story or I think of something to do with that.

However, when it comes to this chapter, this is the single most important chapter of fact that has ever been written, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[1 : 30] It's not fiction. It's not a novel so it's very different in that respect from Rebus. But there is a sense in which it's similar because you are and I am also involved hugely in this passage, you may feel it's very distant from you, very not relevant to your life or to your existence, but every human being is very involved in this account because Jesus did what he did for humanity and he did what he did for people.

And your response to this story has huge consequences for the meaning and the direction and the focus of your life now and eternally.

And I know that very often we come to church and expect it to be kind of inconsequential or maybe just a social hour together that comes and goes and doesn't really impact our lives.

But I really do hope and pray today, as I do every Sunday particularly, but just generally when we are looking at God's Word, that it will impact all of us today much more powerfully than even we anticipated coming to church.

You may be set aside this twenty-five minutes just to have a quick wander through your mind about all that you need to do in the next week or what you would rather be doing than here.

[2 : 55] But I would hope and pray and plead with you to find that it is more significant this hour than you ever imagined it could be and that you will meet with the living God because we believe God is living.

And this is His living Word and Jesus is a living Savior in a way that you could never have anticipated or expected. So I am just going to look at two aspects.

This is a well-known story to us as the Christian church here. We know the resurrection. You have probably read Matthew twenty-eight hundreds of times and maybe it just seemed like, yeah, I know that story.

And that is really amazing. So I just want to look at two aspects of this chapter today that I think remind us of why it is important and also why it is very relevant to us.

And the first is the awesome nature of this chapter. So really there are awesome things happening in this chapter. But also I want to speak about how down to earth it is.

[3 : 58] So there are aspects of it that are really awesome and powerful. They are aspects that are very down to earth. And I think that is really important when we consider it. It is awesome because of several things we see in this.

And the first being that death does not have the last say. Now that is what we think, don't we? And we use the word death in that way all the time.

It is the end of the road. Well, that is it. Death is finished. It is covered. Death is the end of the road. But death doesn't have the last say. And it is a hugely significant fact for all of us who are mortal, all of us who will one day sooner rather than later for some of us face death.

Because this happened, and we are told very specifically, this happened on the first day of the week. Easter Sunday we know is the first day of the week. And that mirrors creation.

It mirrors the very first day that is spoken of in Genesis chapter 1. And on that first day when God was creating, He separated darkness from light.

[5 : 05] Or He brought light into the darkness of creation. And what we have here in this terminology is a reminder of a recreation. Something so cataclysmic and so important.

It is like the original creation, but better. It is a recreation. It is a new day. It is a new beginning. It is an unbelievable hope. That is why when we celebrate the Lord's Supper and it talks about His blood being the blood in a new covenant, because it is a new day and something new and very important has happened.

And we see it even in the circumstances of the hour that the people surrounding Jesus and the people around Jesus move from being an absolute and total darkness and misery into the light and into the hope of meeting this resurrected Savior.

And that newness continues to be hugely significant. That death doesn't have the last say. And it is very significant when we think of the days that we are living in just now.

We are sophisticated and world where we are so modern and so developed and mature.

[6 : 23] And yet we have thrown ourselves into murder and chaos and killing as a European people again. Great darkness. There is great darkness around us and sometimes you may see great darkness in your own heart.

There is inexpressible guilt and a need for forgiveness and a despair. And that darkness can be changed into light when we recognize that death doesn't have the last say and that Christ has risen in order to give us new hope and new life and eternal life as we trust in Him.

There is no greater day and no greater claim. It's an act of unconceivable love that Jesus, the Son of God has done what He has done so that we, so that for us death does not have the last say and that we can know even though we die yet we will live when we trust and rejoice in Jesus as Savior. So there is this reality that on the first day death does not have the last say. But also it's awesome because there's an angel in the story, an angel of the Lord, big, scary angel, you know, and not a soft, sappy kind of thing, but a big, strong, fearful being.

And there's an earthquake just to add to the awesomeness of the event. And you know Jesus later on in verse 28 speaks about having authority in heaven and on earth.

[8 : 00] And it's as if these two things come together in the angel and in the earthquake. When heaven and on earth are symbolized as it were, or signified, or represented by the angel who comes to bring the good news and by the earthquake which speaks of the whole earth being affected even by what Jesus is doing.

The unseen spiritual world and the natural world come together. Even hints and images of Genesis chapter 1 and what God was doing in creation, angel of the Lord and the earthquake.

And it's also awesome in the claim of Jesus in verse 18, Jesus said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Not just all authority in the Middle East, not just all authority in Jerusalem, not just all authority for Christians or for those who believe, all authority in heaven and on earth is given to me.

And it kind of that summarizes the old theology as it were of the resurrection, is that the resurrection gives this amazing vindication of what Jesus came to do, what He taught, what He claimed, what He said He would do.

[9 : 18] And it's vindication that God the Father is content and happy with what He did, that He was innocent. He wasn't paying the price for His own sin, otherwise He wouldn't have, He would have stayed dead.

He had paid the price for our sins, and He has risen defeating death having paid the price, paid the ransom as it were for our sins.

And He's bodily resurrected to remind us that there's a bodily resurrection. It's not, we're not just going to be floating about as souls in heaven.

The victory over death in the grave is total. It will be both spiritual and physical. And He is this physical, real body, a death and corruption and disease is also defeated in Jesus Christ's resurrected body.

And that changes everything. Death is defeated and will ultimately be destroyed. And for all who trust in Him, there is forgiveness and hope of a physical resurrection and living with Jesus.

[10:33] The physicality is really important. You know, the body is really important, isn't it? Not just the soul. Our bodies really matter, and the resurrection speaks to that. And so people saw Him, people touched Him, we're told that we've seen by up to 500 people at different times.

Witnesses saw the resurrected Jesus because that seals all that He said and all that He did. All the gospels before, all that He mentioned is sealed in the fact that He is raised from the dead and He did what He said He was coming to do.

It's what all the Old Testament is pointing to. The whole story is in a sense pointing to this one day. And as we trust in Him, we can know that we are justified.

Not because of who we are or what we've done or our goodness, but because what Jesus has done in our place, we can be forgiven and we are empowered to live differently.

The same power that rose Jesus from the dead, the Spirit of God, that rose Jesus from the dead, Jesus' own power, what He was raised from the dead is available to us.

[11:43] We are given the Holy Spirit of God inside us. So for every Christian, the moment they've come to Christ, actually their resurrection has begun. The resurrection has started.

So that even though we feel outwardly we are fading away, some of us more quickly may be than others inwardly, we're being renewed because there's this great power of the living God that has been gifted to us.

And Jesus in His ascended glory prays for us and prays on our behalf. And there's no one like Him. There's no one like Jesus Christ.

And He is a purpose in this world. Having authority over heaven and earth, even when we don't understand it, and I'm the first to admit there's so many things that we don't understand.

We don't understand His timing. We don't understand He allows certain things to go on. But He says He has authority. He says He's waiting patiently for everyone who will believe to come in and then He will return.

[12:46] We'll speak about that in the Lord's Supper that we do this until He returns. And until He returns, He says, I will be with you. And He says I've given you a task to do, is to share this good news with the world.

There's much mystery, isn't there? There's much folly, there's much evil, there's much death. But please remember today, death doesn't hold the keys. Evil isn't victorious.

Jesus Christ on the cross and through His resurrection has shown the world. And uniquely, there's nothing and nobody like Him that He holds the keys and all authority is given to Him in heaven and on earth.

So it's an awesome account. It's awesome truth that we've been shared with in this message. But sometimes awesome just doesn't touch us, does it?

Because it's kind of out with our experience and maybe it feels a bit far away and distant. But can we also know that it's very down to earth?

[13:51] This story with all this awesome power is also very down to earth, both in the way the angels act, the angel acts and in the things that Jesus does.

So what's the most down to earth part in this chapter? Don't be afraid. That's what the angel says to Mary, to those that are too much. What Jesus says when He says, don't be afraid.

You know the moment they'd come from? Terrible moment. They weren't going to see a resurrected Savior at the tomb. They were going to anoint His body with oil.

They were going to do what they were doing in the Middle East. They would anoint the body with oil. They were going in great sadness. Their life had been absolutely destroyed.

The one they'd put their hope in as it were, been crucified and taken from them. Great darkness, post-traumatic stress, despair, a loss of dreams.

[14:52] And then, you know, the whole future had been taken from them as it were. And then an earthquake. And then an angel. No wonder they were afraid. No wonder they didn't know what to do. What on earth is happening?

And as it was unfolding, the recognition is that, and we don't think this very often, the truth, truth can be scary.

The truth of Jesus claims, the truth of Jesus' person. The truth of talking about these things, not pleasant for us, not pleasant for me, we don't like talking about life and death and need and guilt and big issues like that.

It can bring great fear. And yet, the angel says and Jesus says, don't be afraid. I know it's very down to earth about this. I don't know if this is just me or maybe I'm reading too much into this, but I think it's remarkable that the angel just sits in the stone.

You know, he's this big, massive, scary angelic being. You know, he could have just stood up and been just even more frightened, but he's kind of sitting. And that's usually, you know, that, that, it puts people at ease a little bit when you're just sitting down rather than standing awesome and powerful.

[16:15] When you sit down, you're kind of putting people at ease. And it's like this amazing spiritual being is just, come on, envision him sitting cross-legged on the stone and just says, look, don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid. And Jesus says that too, because Jesus knows what we're like. He knows what we're like. We tend to be afraid of truth.

We have his claims, afraid of really bad things and rightly so. But when our trust is in Jesus, he says, don't be afraid because all authority is given to me.

But there's also, I think, the understated message of verse 5 and 6 of the angels. The angel speaks and says, look, don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus who was crucified. He's not here. He's risen.

Just as he said, come and see the place where he lay. Now that's very factual. It's very down to earth. It's very understated, isn't it?

[17:14] There's no big fanfare. They just say, listen, he's alive. And he said he was going to be alive. He talked about that. In Mark 9:31, he says, look, I'm going to be handed over to the chief priest and we'll be put to death.

And the third day I'm going to rise again. He told them, but it didn't seem to go into their mind and their heads. But they're just saying, look, it's all there. Don't be surprised just that you weren't listening to what he said he was going to do.

Understated message. And then they say, and also Jesus says, go and tell my friends. Go and tell my friends. Jesus made close friends.

He had that Peter, James and John as closest than he had the twelve disciples, the women around him and many, many people. And he wanted the women around him, Mary and others and the disciples to be told.

Tell my friends, you know, that's what you do, don't you? When you're something amazing to say, who do you want to tell? You don't really, well, maybe it's different now with Twitter. Maybe you just all put it on Twitter or Instagram.

[18:22] Would Jesus have done that? I don't know. But he wanted his friends to know. His friends were hurting. His friends were in pain. They were grieving.

And he said, look, tell them. Tell them. I want them to know. And that's very real, isn't it? It's not fabricated.

There's no great decree where he's breaking news to the whole world. That would be the storyline of a novel. What we have is Jesus saying something very simple.

And then the most ordinary thing of all, down to earth thing is verse nine, where Jesus met them and he says, greetings. If we were to translate that today, he would say, and Jesus met them with a smile and said, hello, that's what it is.

He said, hello with a smile because the word in the original means joy and grace. And he just said, hello, is that not the most understated return from the dead that you could ever imagine?

[19:25] Hello to his friends, hello with a smile. That's the encounter that we look for with Jesus.

As that one word of hello, it's like all of his amazing grace and character is verbalized in that single infinite expression.

Hello. And that's the kind of Savior you need and I need. And I know and you know if you're a Christian. It's not some kind of vague power out there.

Not kind of someone we're scared of coming into his presence. It's the one who says to us, hello, because he loves us and because he wants us to know his grace. And then he says, of course, in a very down earth way at the end, verse 20, behold, I am with you. I'm with you till the end of it. That's what we need, a Savior who is with us.

[20 : 29] As we trust in Him, we can know Him. We can know His friendship. We can know His power and strength to overcome our sin and failure. We can know His forgiveness.

We can know His grace. He indwells us so that death no longer has the hold on us. Its sting has been removed. And until the very end, with Him we have a purpose, a mission to tell people about His love and to see disciples being made so that He will say hello to many more people.

Now just for four minutes, along with it, I mean, there's a lot more in this passage, but along with that awesome reality and the down earth truth, which I think makes it accessible for us.

So you've got God and you've got us and we need the down earth truth to make the awesome something we can reach out for. But there's two clear responses also described here very quickly. And one of them is unbelievable is suppression. So verses 12 to 15 speaks about the church leaders at the time, the elders, the assembled elders.

[21 : 46] The guards went and told them what happened. The guards saw what happened. They saw what happened. They saw the resurrected Savior. They saw the angel. And they went and told the religious leaders who were the ones who would put Jesus to death because they were jealous of Him.

Didn't want Him around. Now think about that. They didn't not believe. They didn't deny that it happened.

When they heard what had happened, they made this astonishing counter narrative to try and explain it away.

And they said, oh, you tell, we'll give you lots of money. You tell everyone that the disciples stole the body away and you were sleeping.

Dangerous for a Roman guard to say that they were asleep. But even the religious church's guards, if they'd been there as well, it was dangerous. So it's an early recorded example of alternative truth or propaganda or misspeaking.

[22 : 49] They didn't want the good news to get out that this remarkable thing. They didn't deny it. They suppressed it because they didn't want to lose what they had, their position, their wealth, losing face among their contemporaries, the mockery of them being wrong and Jesus being right.

They're pride. They wanted to keep on hold of the authority they had of their lives. But I want control. I don't want Jesus to be in there. I don't want that. So they suppressed it.

The grip of sinful autonomy being their own bosses was so great, so overwhelming that they changed the story.

And it's a reminder for all of us, I think, that often it's not a question of evidence about Jesus. The quality of evidence of Jesus being resurrected and of his claims, the problem is not evidence. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart, is that we have this antagonism within us naturally against God because of our sin and our autonomy.

[23 : 56] And our wanting to go our own way, and he alone can break that because it's deathly and it's destructive and it's deceiving and it's lies.

And we see that often, don't we, the reality of the world, in the world in which we live. Chooses death and darkness and brutality.

And people, when they hear the good news of the gospel, often treat it as scary or to be suppressed. And very often, sometimes we do that as well. We'll suppress what Jesus is doing because it's too costly in our lives and we simply believe the lie that it's going to be all right on the night.

I'm sure it'll work out fine in the end, but that autonomy leaves us separated from God's love and God's grace and from God's judgment.

We're under God's judgment until we recognize that Jesus paid the price and was judged on our behalf. And greater love is no man than this when he laid down his life for his friends.

[25 : 02] Suppression is one thing. And the other thing lastly is belief. We recognize that they believed. Verse 9 told us that they came and took hold of his feet and they worshiped him.

And verse 17, we're also told that they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. So worship, that's the aim of our lives. That's why we were created to be in a relationship with a

Creator who is worthy of our worship, knowing Him, knowing His presence, knowing His greeting, knowing His hello, knowing that division and that separation being dealt with so that we can be in relationship with Him again.

And it's grounded in this down to earth reality that He knows what our lives are like. Psalm 103 says He knows what we're like and He remembers that we're dust.

He knows that and He comes into that experience Himself, into our physicality, into our world and He understands. And more than that, He gives Himself for us in this remarkable way, the incarnate one.

And we're called as these early disciples to believe. And believe faith is believing, having hope in what we cannot see but what is real nonetheless.

[26 : 24] And seeing and knowing that there is a very real spiritual world and being amazed by, go read 1 Corinthians 15, the amazing passage about the resurrection and its significance.

Make your spine tingle. And Jesus Himself said, blessed are those who don't see like His disciples physically, but who will still believe.

And we'd encourage like them to overcome doubt, full of doubt, aren't we? So many different times. It's easy to drift away from Him and from His truth, which is one of the reasons why we worship together.

And remember, He calls us to respond to His living Word, to pray and be in relationship with Him and be committed to sharing that great good news.

What a great calling we have. The empowers us just to live and reflect Jesus in our lives. I hope we are able to do that. I hope we love Him.

[27 : 21] And I hope if you don't know Him or love Him that you will meet Him today and that you will come to faith in Jesus. I really do. I think that would be amazing. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore.

And all God's people say, Amen.