

# He is Risen!

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So, we're going back to one of the four accounts of the resurrection in John's Gospel and it's obviously our theme for today and it's one you'll not hear much new from me today, but I think it's always good to, as Christians, go back to the foundations of our faith and remind ourselves of why it is so significant for us.

You know, if you were to think or if you were to ask people what would be the single most important truth in your life or maybe in human history, there'd be all kinds of different answers for that, wouldn't there?

Whether it would be personal or kind of more cosmic, if we call it that. It might be the most significant thing, well, you marry me. It may be it's a girl or you have a clean bill of health.

I've doubled your salary. Dad, I love you. You've won the holiday of a lifetime. Your cancer is not terminal.

There is a vaccine. A ceasefire has been announced. The wall has come down. The king is dead. Global warming has been reversed.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] Mars can sustain human life. There's all kinds of really significant and important statements that we can make with regard to both the world in which we live and also our individual lives.

And whatever we think, whatever our priorities lie, whatever choice, whether it's individual or global, either way, there is absolutely no more significant truth universally than the gospel claim that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is Son of God.

Son of God is risen from the dead. That is the single most, both personal and cosmic claim of the gospel because it implicates every single life.

It implicates every single human being because it deals with something that is a reality in all of our lives.

If you're not a Christian today and maybe you're watching online for the first time, it's Easter Sunday and you've plugged into a church service, at least I'm asking and challenge you to at least face up to the claim of Jesus Christ and to face up to this most significant of facts that we've begun our worship with, He is risen.

[ 2 : 3 8 ] And as Christians, we're continually reminded as believers to live in the light of this reality. We should change how you rise from this church building today.

Should change how you wake up tomorrow morning. Should change the reactions and the lives that we live in the world in which we live. So the resurrection of Jesus is well worth returning to for a few moments this morning.

And what we notice in the gospel of John and the account that we've read together, and indeed the same in all the gospels, it's presented, it's not presented as myth, it's not presented as a spiritual reality that might encourage us to think about future life.

It is presented as historical fact. That's the significance and importance of the gospel accounts. There is physically an empty tomb that they go and check out.

There is angelic confirmation, which means that there's also a spiritual element to what is going on. And there's a physical Jesus in the account of the resurrection, different undoubtedly, certainly, but there's visible scars that he asks people to look at and to touch and to see the wound in his side, fresh anew from the just the previous three days.

[ 3 : 57 ] And in each instance that he meets with people in this chapter that we read, we're told that they have seen him. There's eyewitnesses. They have seen the Lord in verse 18.

We have that when he first sees them. He says on that first day, the disciples were for fear of Jesus, Jesus came, stood among them and said to them, peace be with you. And they had, they saw him and they saw his hands and his side.

And then as well in verse 20, they were glad that they had seen the Lord. And in verse 29 again with Thomas, Jesus said, have you believed because you've seen me.

So there's this very physical factual reality of a risen savior. Mary thought it was a gardener. Now the gardener wasn't a spook gardener. Wasn't a, wasn't a ghost gardener was a real person.

And she thought she'd seen a gardener when it was Jesus. When Jesus said her, don't touch me because he wasn't a spirit. He was a physical reality that she was discouraged from touching, which we're not going to look at that and go into that this morning.

[ 5 : 06 ] And these physical factual accounts that we are given are preceded of course by the facts of his death, both the torture and the spear and the nails and the embalming and the time that he remained in the tomb.

It's all given as cold, real facts for us. And that's important, the facts of the gospel because we and the visibility of that.

That's important because that's what we see and what we recognize in the reality of death and life ourselves. There's a viscosity about it.

If that's a real word, there's a viscosity and death and the fact of death. You know, there's a, there's a cold, lifeless body. There's a finality about the grave and about the separation.

There's the atrophy towards dust. There's the, but there's the disintegration even before that. There's the illness. There's the failing eyesight that I have. There's the weakening muscles. There's the balding head.

[ 6 : 12 ] There's going death. There's Alzheimer's. The decomposition of health and strength and vitality, the separations, the relational separations from one another and the friendships that are broken.

There's a, there's a, there's a factual reality in all of these things and in life and death. And that spiritually is spoken into in the gospels and into the life of Jesus who says that there's a spiritual dimension to all of that reality.

And of course, we know that's not believed universally, but in the, in the reality of death, there's a separation of body and soul, the relational separation from the author of life, from the author of life of God himself.

The final outworking of something that's been present from our birth, a relational separation from the living God.

So there's that moral aspect to death that our sins separates us from the living God. The judgment on our human condition. There's that fragility, the confusion and the darkness of our experiences in life that are more than just tangible and real, but our spiritual dimension to them.

[ 7 : 30 ] Now, that sounds very gloomy and do, you know, there's a lot of love and there's a lot of laughter and there's a lot of beauty in the world in which we live as well.

Reflecting the reality of God's goodness and grace, but it's simply whispers, isn't it? It's simply fading beauty. And each of us, all of us crave these better moments.

We crave these best moments of life. We love them, we cherish them so much, but we know that they never last. We are aware of that. And there's a longing in humanity for something more, isn't there?

For something more tangible for something that lasts. I would argue, and I may be wrong here, but I would argue that maybe even the most stringent unbeliever who believes only in what there is in this world senses that need to be good enough, senses this longing for vindication and for justice and for beauty to last and for beauty to remain and for love not to be broken, and even recognizes that suppression of God within all the God to whom one day we're all accountable.

That's spiritual reality in all of us. And I think that's sometimes when you talk about sharing our faith and sometimes it's very difficult to do that and we feel guilty maybe about that because people might say to us, well, it's good news, it's great news.

[ 8 : 59 ] Why are you feel bad about that? It's, you know, if you have a wedding in the family or a new baby or a new job or something, it's good news and you tell everyone and everyone's happy.

Why is it any different with the gospel? Well, the difference with the gospel is because there's this recognition that there's a God that we don't want to deal with and when it is brought up, even as good news, we say, well, we really don't want to deal with that.

We suppress that knowledge and there's that great sense of God's alienation from God. So we have the facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

They are reflected in our lives and in the facts of the life around us. And that fact of Jesus' resurrection that's spoken of here as fact is hugely significant, is vital because it seals all his life and all his teaching, doesn't it?

If the fact of the resurrection is true that Jesus rose from the dead on the other side of death, then it seals everything that he said before that and it seals his claims to us.

[ 10 : 14 ] And so ultimately, it's not a question of whether we like it or not. It's a question of whether he rose or not. That is the crucial question. That's the crucial reality for us and all his claims that go with that, that there's a spiritual reality to death and there's a separation and an enslavement in death that he has come to deal with and he has come to put right.

And his resurrection therefore is not so much at one level, it's not so much about Jesus, it's about us. It's about our problem and our reality and our judgment which Jesus came to deal with on the cross.

An issue that we are powerless to deal with on our own. So in many ways Christ is saying in his resurrection, death is not my reality.

It's not my reality. I'm God the Son. I have never rejected the Father. There is no separation between me and the Father, no sin that would cause estrangement between me and the Father.

I and the Father are one. We're in this loving relationship together. I'm the author of life. Life he says belongs to me. Death is not my reality.

[ 11 : 39 ] But he says I have taken your death and I have taken your place and I have taken your sin and I have taken your guilt and I have experienced your death on the cross and I've paid the price.

So that in his resurrection that we might know his life and his forgiveness and his hope and his future and he does that he says because I love you.

It's as simple as that. Now have you graduated beyond that? Are you tired of hearing that? Is it a message that no longer sparks within us a sense of awe and wonder and release and freedom and hope?

Christ is reminding us that the power, spiritual power of darkness and death is lost from all who will put their trust on him.

And the facts of that matter that you go back to that and that I go back to that is significant and important because it is declared as fact and it is presented as fact that we have a resurrected Savior and as we trust in him that we too, even though the Bible says we die, we too will live.

[ 13 : 04 ] We will know that resurrection bodily, physically and into the new heavens and new earth. So the fact of the resurrection is very important and it is accompanied in this chapter by a very powerful message.

So in the resurrection of Jesus 2,000 years ago, it's a doorway for us to find many realities in our lives but I'm going to pick out two from this chapter particularly that the fact of the resurrection as we entrust our lives to the Christ who is raised makes a difference.

And I think they're very significant things. The first is peace. You notice and I've often said this from here that when the Bible in one place says things repeatedly it's important.

So when God decides that we really, really need to hear something, he'll say it more than once. And in this short passage that Esther read, three times Jesus in his dealings with the disciples and others says, peace with you.

In verse 19, he says it to them on that day when he came to meet with the disciples in the door being locked because they were afraid of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

[ 14 : 30 ] And in verse 21 he repeated it. Jesus said to them again, he said to them again, peace be with you. And then in verse 26 when he was dealing with Thomas and Thomas then was in the room with the disciples the second time, he says to them all, peace be with you.

You know, he doesn't just say peace. He doesn't say, hey, peace brother. He says, peace be on you. This is the fruit of the resurrection.

It's the reality of what Jesus offers to those who are afraid or guilty or lost when they put their trust in him. God the Son says, peace with you.

That every believer. Now, the word that's used for peace here is a Greek word from which we get the English word, ironic.

It's not a word we use very much today. It's a nice word. It's a nice sounding word, ironic, I think. And if you're an ironic person, you're a conciliatory person.

[ 15 : 36 ] You're someone who seeks to make peace. It's not a word. It's an adjective that's used very often. But that's, it's about, it really means bringing together something that's been a part.

It's the peace of restored unity, of relationship, of healing, that ironic. It's the wholeness that Jesus is speaking about here.

It's really the same as the Hebrew word that we often speak about, shalom. It's not just speaking about the absence of war or such. But there's a wholeness about it.

There's a spiritual dimension to it, as well as a relational dimension. And Jesus is saying, my resurrection is the gateway to this experience of peace in your life.

And play that vertical peace with God, so that He can say, peace, be with you, because the relationship between God, the fracture between ourselves and God is healed for everyone who puts their trust in Jesus, because the cause of that fracture has been dealt with by Jesus and the cross.

[ 16 : 48 ] Through Christ, through His resurrection, and our trust in Him, we are united with God and eternal life. Can I just make a practical application?

Because the spiritual application is easy, and your eyes glaze over because you say, yeah, I know that. I've heard all that before. I'm peace with God through Jesus Christ. But you know, there's a horizontal aspect as Christians to this peace, as well, is that with the life of Christ in our hearts, we have a motivation and a power to enact peace.

In our relationships. And we are to have that focus and motivation as peace lovers in our lives.

Now, I'm not talking about going in the front line with a white flag. I'm talking about with your husband and wife. I'm talking about with your children.

I'm talking about with our colleagues, that we have this sense of peace, that sense of bringing people together. That's our task.

[ 17 : 58 ] It's part of our role. It's both to be peacemakers and peace inspires. That's what we're to be in the office. I know things are different just now with COVID and everything else.

We're not seeing people as much. But when we do and when that comes to being the case, we're to be those who are not at the expense of justice and not at the expense of truth, but we're to be those who with hearts of grace seek to reconcile.

We are ironic people. We are people who are to draw the divisions and the separations that we find sometimes in our own lives, sometimes in our own marriages, sometimes in our own families, sometimes in our own workplaces.

We're to bring them to the living God in Christ. So the powerful message of peace, peace I give to you, he says, it's your gift.

It's for you. And it's the message of the gospel. But related to that also is forgiveness. Now, the two are not indistinct and they're not separated either.

[ 19 : 05 ] But we find there in verse 23, where Jesus is speaking to the disciples. He says, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any there, forgive them. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.

And this embryonic very early revelation of the New Testament church, the founders of the New Testament church, Jesus is bestowing on them the significant role of being those who bring the message of forgiveness and who declare that forgiveness in Jesus' name.

Now in Matthew 26 verse 28, we have Jesus saying the same thing. This is in the context of the Lord's Supper intimately related to remember the Lord's Supper is not just about the death of Jesus.

We're not remembering a dead person. It's do this in remembrance of me for as often as you can until I come to recognize that he's a living Savior. But at that time, he said, for this is the blood of my covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

And then again in Acts 2, that great Pentecostal sermon that Peter preached, he said to them, repent and be baptized. Probably many of them who were there were the ones that previously a few days earlier had cried, crucify him.

[ 20 : 22 ] Crucify him. Repent and be baptized everyone in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins.

So there's this hugely significant reality that comes from the resurrection, the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that he can declare forgiveness on us when we put our trust in him and ask him to take away our sins.

Why? Because he's paid the price and because he knows it. He knows every single one of them who's paid the price. He's borne the weight of them on his own shoulders. Justice has been served.

He can't pay that price again. God is pleased with his son. He raises him as that seal on his work. This is God's divine wish.

There is no plan B. This is what God has ordained on. That is the claim of the gospel. That is why the facts of the resurrection matter. It's not some kind of woolly thing that just makes us think, oh, I'd be nice just to, yeah, Easter time with bunnies and with daffodils and resurrection and Easter time and spring.

[ 21 : 32 ] It's not just saying that. It's saying something far more profound and deeper that's at the heart of the universe.

That these words he has risen is, are the three words at the heart of the universe. And the reality that in this act of Christ alone is forgiveness.

We all fall short. We all die. Part of that, all of that has the spiritual reality of separation from life.

And he says, you're forgiven. You're forgiven. You're free. The weight has been taken off.

Before the greatest judge of all, you're innocent. You're innocent. And again, that's a great spiritual truth that we take. He can't prove that, can you?

[ 22 : 33 ] You don't have a document that says you're forgiven, that you can show to everyone. But we believe it by faith and we respond to the claims of the gospel and the facts of the resurrection.

But can I say, you can prove it, not so much with that vertical declaration which we accept by faith, but in the way you treat other people and the heart of forgiveness that you have and that I have for other people.

The fact of the resurrection that Jesus says, he is risen, empowers you and indeed gives you the responsibility not to be a grudge-bearer, not to be embittered, not to have a long memory of the failings of others and a short memory at your own.

Empowers you to deal with the hurt and the pain that causes you grief and division. You're empowered to forgive others and to release them from that sense of guilt in their relationship with you.

Forgiveness in, again, the same things, in marriage, in the home, in the workplace, that we are known, that we are recognized as people who are forgiving.

[ 23 : 55 ] No, that's not cheap. That is costly. But we're empowered so to do. That is the characteristic of this church, it should be, isn't it?

We should be a peace-loving, forgiving people. That is what we should be known as, primarily and almost exclusively.

These are offered. This is the powerful message that Jesus brings. And of course, in conclusion, we know that the facts of the resurrection and the purpose of Jesus require us to take a step of faith to entrust our lives to Him.

Now, it's not blind faith. That's why we're given facts. That's why it's recorded. That's why there's all these manuscripts. That's why the Gospels focus so much attention on the last week of Jesus' life.

It's not blind faith. We can apply reason to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There's a consciousness that we can recognize, a morality that is offered, an image bearing that reflects what we're like as people.

[ 25 : 11 ] There's reason and there's reality. There's reality of looking around us, isn't there? You know that something's wrong. Everyone knows that something's wrong.

There's beauty and there's love and there's life, but there's loss and there's fear and there's doubt. And the facts of the resurrection speak into that reality and into the reason that God has given us, the reason as in our mind's reasoning.

And you've got the fact of the changed lives, transformed lives of millions of people over 20 centuries.

And it's important for us to recognize that. This morning on the 70s of prayer, which we do twice a year and we do it primarily to gather together and pray for the people we know and love who don't know Jesus Christ that God will open their hearts.

And we started that this morning and I really encourage you to say a little bit more at the end just to do that. But today, each day we're going to have a short testimony of someone who's become a Christian because it's just a nice reminder of what we're doing and why we're doing it.

[ 26 : 26 ] And today was great because today it was the testimony of someone who's been a Christian for over 40 years who became a Christian as a 16-year-old here in St. Columbus.

Okay? And then has been away from St. Columbus and other places and other churches for 40 years and is now back as one of the core church planters in Winchborough, a plant of St. Columbus free church.

And God was working 40 years ago now, whoever would have tried, whoever, the God's way ahead of us in all of these things. And that's encouraging, it's encouraging for us to have heard that this morning that God knew about the church planning movement that would happen in St. Columbus 40 years after Will Start's conversion.

So we see and we have evidences of God at work in many different ways and we're called to believe. In verse 29, Jesus says it to Thomas who's doubting, isn't he?

He says, you know, have you believed because you've seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. And also John himself, the whole purpose of the book that he's written, he said, these things are written.

[ 27 : 36 ] This is why I've written it. He says so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you might have life in His name. So believing is a critical step in coming to terms with the facts of the resurrection.

It's not good enough just to be aware of the facts. We have to entrust our lives to what these facts demonstrate about the person of Christ.

And you need, if you're not a Christian as you're watching today, you need a turn to God. I'm asking you to do that. I'm asking you to speak to Him, to entrust yourself to the fact that He's alive, that He's ascended.

Confess your need to Him. Put His love and the free offer of eternal life that He gives and recognize that initial relationship of peace and forgiveness being restored and live it then from day to day in your life.

It's a gift. It's a gift. We don't need to earn it before Him. It's an absolute gift. Let's drop all pretense of being good enough on our own because death silences that claim, doesn't it?

[ 28 : 53 ] And only in Christ is there life that isn't dying. So the Bible says we are being renewed day by day.

So physically there is a deterioration and a death. So there's a new and one day there will be a reconstitution marvelously, physically, of our bodies.

So believe and also bring others to believe as well. That's the task of the church, isn't it? To, I don't mean a church as an institution as such, but I mean us as individuals, as part of the church and as communities.

In verse 21, Jesus says to them, peace be with you, as the Father has sent me so even I am sending you. So there's like a great kind of partnership with the divine tasks that the Father sent the Son and so also Jesus then sends us as believers to bring others to believe.

Isn't that great that we are ambassadors of Jesus and as Jesus obeyed and being sent by the Father so we obey Jesus and being sent by Him.

[ 30 : 09 ] And then we send people, where do we send them? We send them to Jesus. We send them back to Jesus. What are we probably, we bring them to Jesus, might be a better word.

We don't stand here and say, I will go to Jesus. We bring them to Jesus. We introduce our friends to Jesus and so send our friends to Jesus and introduce them.

That's the greatest challenge, isn't it? The greatest challenge we face, pleading and leading as believers. That's our role in evangelism.

Every one of us, it's pleading and leading. That's why we do the seven days of prayer and I hope, I just hope we never get bored of doing it. That it's the place where we do the pleading.

Because it has to be, doesn't it? Because we need Christ and we need God to work, to bring people to faith and we need God to work in people's lives.

[ 31 : 05 ] But we're also to be leading. We're to be provoking, challenging, forgiving, being peace lovers, sharing, even when that's difficult, even when we know sometimes that it's not what people necessarily want to hear.

But we pray that in love and grace that the barriers that they face to Jesus will be unlocked by the love we show and by the power of Christ at work in their hearts.

So I plead with you to be a pleading people. Come along if you can. Even if you can only come to one of the seven days of prayer, half seven in the morning, there will be a testimony each day and a time just to pray for our friends.

Where else can we go? We have the greatest news in the world that He has risen. Has it transformed our lives so that we are people that other people look at and want a bit of what we've got?

Let's pray. Father God, help us to be people who look more like you every day and we thank you that you forgive us and you don't hold us guilty.

[ 32 : 24 ] You don't expect us to be world changers in our own strength or in our own ability. But you simply ask us to trust you and to love you and to love others.

And as we love others with the love of Christ, it will clearly provoke in them questions as we are ironic and as we are forgiving.

That will provoke questions in other people. There is no doubt about that because we live in days where there is much tension, much separation and division, much heartache and pain and bitterness and division.

Help us to live out who we are. God in our hearts, Lord also in our homes and then in the church and also in our workplaces and in our neighborhoods that we might live out the life of Christ wherever we are.

In Jesus' name, Amen.