

Title: He is Risen, Indeed!
Text: Revelation 1.9-20
Theme: Why the Resurrection of Jesus matters
Occasion: Resurrection Day 2013
Prop Stmt The implications of the resurrection may be denied for a time, but they will not be ignored forever, by anyone.

It is now some 50-60 years after that glorious Sunday when Peter and John went and discovered that the tomb of Christ was empty. John witnessed and experienced the birth and growth of the church. He has seen Jerusalem fall to the Romans, the temple, along with the city burned to rubble. Now, the disciples were dead, most of them executed for the faith. John was an old man, exiled to an island in the Aegean Sea called Patmos that he shared with other political prisoners of Rome. Before John would die, he had one final message to deliver to the churches. The message was given to him from Christ. And his vision of Christ that day only affirmed what he already knew to be true. Christ had risen. Christ had ascended. And Christ was returning.

Read Text:

The claim of the resurrection is bold and we know it is bold. It is basically unheard of, and yet we stake our entire lives upon this truth. Without this event, not just a story, but without the actuality of this event, we have nothing, and we know it. We know that if it could be proven that Christ did not rise again, then we would close the doors and never return.

But, we have no such concern. From the day of Christ's resurrection, the reality of this event has been attacked, but no attack has been effective. We also know that it has been attacked because for so many people, they think that if it is true, they are in big trouble. Every attack has spent itself and frustrated itself because the fact of the resurrection, like all truth, is a stubborn thing and it exposes that those who accuse us of believing a myth, themselves believe a myth. Challenges to the fact of the resurrection have failed, and have failed miserably. We welcome honest investigators. Here is what you find:

- They cannot explain the event.
- They cannot explain the birth of faith in the disciples and the radical change in their lives. Jesus was dead. The hope of the disciples was dead. Then, all of a sudden, these hopeless disciples were suddenly transformed into pillars of confidence with the resolve of steel.
- They cannot explain the empty tomb.
- They cannot explain why no body was ever found, and you know that the Pharisees and other authorities were hell-bent on finding one, if they could.
- They cannot explain the change of day of worship from Saturday to Sunday.
- They cannot explain the testimonies of more than 500 witnesses who saw Christ.
- They cannot explain why these appearances were seen for 40 days and then stopped.

- They cannot explain the failure of the Jewish leaders and the Romans to disprove the message of the resurrection.
- They cannot explain the conversion of two skeptics: James, the half-brother of Jesus and Saul of Tarsus.
- They cannot discredit the moral character of the witnesses, most of whom paid for their testimony with their lives.

We know what is at stake here, and we have no concerns and we are not ashamed, for we know whom we have believed, and we are convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to us. (2 Tim. 1.12) Truth stands on its own. Whether we defend it, believe it, proclaim it, attack it, attempt to deny it, or try to ignore it still stands on its own. For that reason, the Bible never commands us to go out and defend the resurrection. It is! We are to go out and proclaim the gospel and we do with humility because of our weakness, but with boldness because of this truth. In this text, Christ is revealing himself in his glory to John. John describes what Christ looks like, and then John records what Christ says. I will not address all of it, but what I want you to note is how important the resurrection of Christ is, to Christ himself. This event has enormous bearing upon us.

I. **Jesus told the truth.** (16)

“from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword”

This phrase (a sharp two-edged sword) refers to the Word of God. The Word of God creates, establishes, defines and refines. It judges, reveals, affirms and it heals. It enlightens, emboldens, convicts and renews. It relieves the grieving, assures the humble and breaks the proud. There is nothing that is more powerful, nor more personal. There is also nothing that is more threatening. Jesus was not condemned for what he did, but for what he said. But, what Jesus said was the truth, because he is the truth. You can try to condemn the truth, but if you do, it will condemn you. You cannot stop it, nor contain it. It is the truth.

Jesus always told the truth. He was not always believed, nor understood, but Jesus always told the truth. He told his disciples about his resurrection before it happened, which would be incredulous. In fact, it appears that the disciples simply dismissed it, because they never acted as if they thought that his resurrection was even a possibility, much less a probability. Nevertheless, Christ told them the truth because he knew it was going to be so. (Matthew 16, 17 and 20). The word of God, and here, the words of Jesus are described as being a two-edged sword because truth is intimidating, terrifying and condemning to those who believe lies, but the same truth is liberating and forgiving to those who embrace it. The Pharisee who was on the wrong side of truth was threatened to his very core by the reality of the resurrection. But, there is another edge to that sword. The same truth that condemns the proud, rescues the humble. The sword is the sword. The truth is the truth. It is how you respond to it that determines what edge affects you. When you acknowledge that God’s Word is the final authority, and you live under his Word, you experience the comfort of his promises. However, if you reject His Word, and

presume to live by your own law, his Word will be, for you a threat. At the age of 28, Rosaria Butterfield, a graduate student, publicly identified herself as a lesbian. Eight years later, as a professor at Syracuse University, she watched with great concern a movement in the 90's called Promise Keepers and she wrote a critique of it for a local newspaper. As you would expect, she received many letters in response, which were on one of two sides of a great divide. She was either attacked or supported. But one letter did neither. It came from a Presbyterian pastor, who simply asked her some questions that she had not thought about, and at the end of letter asked her to give him a call. She tried to throw the letter away several times, but kept retrieving it from the trash. Finally, she called the guy, and he invited her to come and have dinner with his family. She did. That night, his family treated her as a human being. They welcomed her, fed her and before the meal, prayed. By this time Rosaria was planning on writing a book on the religious right, so she needed to read the book that had gotten all of these foolish people so off track. After all it would make sense, if you taught literature, that you ought to be conversant with the most popular literary work in the history of the world, wouldn't it? Two things happened that night: 1) She made some friends, real friends. Friends who would share things with her, do things with her, and do things for her. 2) She began to read the Bible. Truth is more than a stubborn thing; it is a powerful thing. As she read, her worldview began to implode. Her live-in was scared and told her so. She was changing. Something was happening to her. Rosaria said to her live-in, "I'm reading the Bible, reading it a lot, and what if it's true? We are in big trouble if it's true." Jesus was and is so controversial because he always told the truth. His resurrection is just more evidence of that.

II. **Jesus is eternally relevant and will be reckoned with.** (17, 18)

I am the first and the last and the living one

This is the point of the book of Revelation. Revelation is not primarily revealing what is going to happen in this world. As the very first verse (1.1) makes clear, this book is the revealing, the unveiling of Jesus Christ and his dealings with our world. So, when Jesus reveals himself in his glory to John and says, *I am the first and the last, and the living one, the one who died and is alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and hades*, he is making it very clear that you are dealing with me and you will always deal with me and everyone will deal with me. I am alive. I rose again. I cannot be thwarted. We are not in judgment of him, and he is not intimidated by us. He is the unstoppable, unalterable, undeniable, unbreakable, unremovable, unimpeachable, unfathomable, irreducible, irrevocable, irreplaceable and invincible King. He is the eternal present tense. He is the ancient of days, the great I AM, and the blessed hope. He is never out of style, out of date, out of the way, or out of time.

Notice this; whenever the church has attempted to be relevant to the world, it has always become irrelevant. The world is not helped by those who agree with its course of self-destruction, the world is only helped by those who disagree with it and provide a solution. The words of Jesus may be panned by our world, and we who embrace him be thought of as being completely uncool. Bring it on. But this world is passing away. She is

betrayed by the smell of formaldehyde that is in her veins. Only Jesus is the first and the last. This world is so yesterday. Perhaps you heard of the story of two battleships years ago assigned to the training squadron that had been at sea on maneuvers in heavy weather off the California coast for several days. One evening as night fell, the captain of one of the battleships remained on the bridge. Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing of the bridge reported, "Light. Bearing on the starboard bow." "Is it steady or moving astern?" the captain asked. The lookout replied, "Steady, captain," which meant the battleship was on a collision course with the other ship. The captain called to the signalman, "Signal that ship. You are on a collision course. Advise you alter course 20 degrees." Back came the answering signal, "Advisable that you change course 20 degrees." The captain said, "Send another message. I am a senior captain. Change course 20 degrees." Back came the response, "I am a seaman second class, change your course at once." The officer was furious. He replied, "We are a battleship squadron. Change your course 20 degrees." The flashing light replied, "I am a lighthouse." We do not stick our fingers in the wind in an attempt to discern which way the winds of popular opinion happen to be blowing at the moment, so we can simply echo what the world already believes. Truth is not a finger in the wind. It is a lighthouse that does not move, and that is why it is always relevant. When Jesus said that he is the first and last, he was making it clear that he is forever, which means that his word is eternally true. You can pass a law banning him from public discourse, but he is eternally present. You can pretend to redefine marriage, genders and the family, but it is personal and social suicide to defy the eternal word of the king.

III. **The cross has enormous implications.** (18) *I died*

If Jesus had just died, and theoretically paid for our sins, what good would that have done? If the death of Christ only made it possible for us to be reconciled to God, but did not result in the defeat of death itself, what good would that be? But the resurrection changed all of that. In fact, the resurrection gives meaning to the cross. The disciples along with the early preachers and writers in the church said very little about the death of Christ without speaking about his resurrection. The two go hand in hand. The fact of the death of Christ is followed by the fact of the resurrection of Christ. There are several different places in the New Testament where summary statements about the gospel are made. These statements, like 1 Corinthians 15.1-3 and Romans 10.9 make it crystal clear that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is essential to the gospel. Without the resurrection there is no good in the gospel. Without the resurrection we would simply have news. The resurrection is what makes it good news.

Imagine a boyfriend and girlfriend separated by war, who after several years, are reunited, only to die in an accident the day before their wedding. Their reunion would be of little consolation if there was no time to be able to enjoy it. And so it is with the death of Christ. If he never rose again, our salvation would be incomplete at best and basically meaningless at worst. But, he is risen! The resurrection is the completing event that guarantees that the penalty for our sin has been paid in full. The cry of Christ, "It is finished" would be nothing more than a pleasant thought and noble goal from a deranged and deluded man, if he died and remained in the grave. But, the resurrection of Christ guaranteed that this cry became our jailbreak; his death did indeed set the captive free.

IV. The resurrection seals the deal. (18)

“and behold I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

When you deposit a check into the bank, the bank holds that check until it clears. In the banking industry, they say that the check is pending. It is there, but you do not get credit for it, yet. When the deposited check is found to be legitimate, that is, there are enough funds to make good on the check, then your account is credited with that money. The check is no longer pending; it is now cleared. When Christ died on the cross, he, in effect, signed the check that paid for your sin, in full. When Christ rose again from the dead, it was the Father’s way of saying that the check had just cleared the bank. This means that:

A. The curse and power of sin is broken.

At the end of 1 Corinthians 15, the glorious chapter on the resurrection, Paul writes, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” (v.56) But, the resurrection of Christ removes the sting of death and breaks the power of the law to condemn us because the resurrection is proof positive that the penalty against our sin has been completely exhausted. There is no curse left. The power of sin to condemn you was completely used up on Christ. And since it is God who justifies (Romans 8.33) there is no one left with any authority to condemn you.

B. You can be forgiven.

What are fearful of? Are you afraid of a sin from your past? Do you fear that your failure can never be atoned? Do you have this nagging concern that your addiction, your broken promises, your enslavement to things, your immorality, or your secret sins go too deep to be forgiven? The resurrection means that Jesus is a far bigger Savior than you are a sinner. When Christ died on the cross, he died as an offering in payment for the debt of your sin. When Christ died on the cross, he died as a substitute in your place because you could not pay for your sin. In fact, you could not and cannot contribute one single thing toward your forgiveness. Jesus paid it all. Jesus did it all. Pardon from God that forgives you completely, and righteousness from God that justifies you fully and life from God that guarantees you life with him forever is yours by faith alone in Christ alone. This is yours because of his grace alone. You do not deserve it, just like he did not deserve to die. As infinite of an injustice, his death was, so infinite is the generosity of his grace to you. Will you repent of your sin and trust in Christ? If you have trusted in Christ as your Savior and King, you are already forgiven! Jesus was raised for our justification (Rom. 4.25).

C. Death has been cursed.

There is one funeral that we will all want to attend. There is one funeral where it will be fitting to throw a party for and that is the funeral of death. At that funeral, there will be no dirges, no mourning, and no tears. We will join the theologically correct trash-talking

prophet Hosea who taunted the enemy by saying, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

Today, we live in the midst of a culture of death. It is the air that we breathe. We live with its reality constantly around us. We live with bodies that are prone to break down, develop cancers, and suffer from disease. We live with a fear of what the doctor will say, what the test will reveal and what the treatment may not accomplish. But, the physical presence of death in our bodies is just the fruit of a curse that is on all creation due to sin. Sin causes humankind to be terribly conflicted. On the one hand, we grieve with deep angst the calloused and calculated murder of 24 children in an elementary school, but ignore the daily murder of 4,000 infants in the slaughterhouses called abortion clinics in our land. In China, it is estimated that they have murdered 336,000,000 babies. This earth has shown over and over that it will heave and convulse and vomit over bloodshed, violence and rebellion. This land lives under the curse of the human-race that has forfeited its position as a steward over this great planet. But one day, death will be no more. One day, the curse will be banished by the one who broke its power. Death will no longer be the curse; death will be banished because the resurrection of Christ placed an unbreakable curse upon death, and placed an unbreakable promise upon us.

D. The grave cannot hold us.

Jesus said, “*I have the keys of Death and Hades.*” His resurrection guarantees our resurrection. The grave holds no power over us. This is not the end.

V. We will live forever. (17) – *Fear not*

Hugo Chavez was a thug. He lived as a one-man wrecking ball that destroyed lives and families at his whim. He lied to the poor of his country, and manipulated them with promises of wealth so they would empower him to the position of president of Venezuela where he could skim vast amounts of money from the oil-rich country. He was a law unto himself, so he thought. But dying has a way of revealing the coward that was behind the mask, and the fear that lay beneath the threats. In the moments before he died, he pleaded with his aids, not to let him die. The most powerful man in an entire country was powerless before the enemy of death. If you have trusted in Christ, that is not your story, and that is not your fate. Oh, your body will die, but death will not own you. The one who owns you already took your death, and he stands with you, holding its keys. And when you come to the end, the One who walks with you will stay with you. The Resurrected One...He’s got this one, for you. He’s got your back.

The resurrection is not only the completing event that provides for the cleansing of our guilt it also is our guarantee that we shall live again. Because He lives, I too shall live! Forever.

Conclusion:

All of this means that life matters! This also means that the gospel is the greatest news that you could hear. It means that the gospel is the greatest news that you could ever believe. It means that the gospel is the greatest news that you could ever share. And it means that the church is the greatest family to which you could ever belong. No matter whom you are.

In 1999, Rosaria Champagne Butterfield publicly repented of her sins and told her church of her faith in Christ. That fall, she opened up her semester lecture series at Syracuse with this same acknowledgement. There were a lot of people that she cared about, who thought that she had let them down, when, by God's grace, she was and is just pointing them to the way. She is whole now. The incredibly good news of a resurrected Savior has a way of doing that, you know.