

Title: The First and the Last
Text: Revelation 1.17-20
Theme: He's not done
Occasion: Resurrection Sunday, 2010
Prop Stmtnt The Resurrection of Christ is evidence that there's more to come!

Read Text:

Christianity is a unique religion. It does not pretend to be just one of the many options in the buffet line of philosophies, cultural beliefs, traditions and practices. Christianity claims to be more than the best option of the bunch, or the one that you ought to try because it makes the most sense. No, it claims to be the only true religion and states unequivocally and unapologetically that all others are false. That claim is not an arrogant claim, but a factual one. Other systems of belief, (some of which even confuse the issue by calling themselves Christian) are well-meaning, perhaps dedicated and sincere, but false! Genuine Christianity claims to be the system of belief that ties all of life, all of creation, all existence and matter, logic and language, history and science, philosophy and art together into one complete, unbroken, system of truth. That is bold! That is audacious! That is clearly opinionated. But is it wrong? Even though, this is the claim, can it be defended?

We are in the final weekend of March Madness, the 64-team, premier, college basketball tournament that in the end crowns the undisputed champion of men's collegiate hoops for the year. At the end, there is one team left standing. There is only one team that does not lose a game. Only one team gets to cut down the nets and wave it before their fans. Only one team gets the trophy that is used prominently for recruiting because most of the current players are probably jumping to the NBA draft. But, even though there is only one team that can rightfully claim to be number one, every time the cameras pan the student body section and the cheerleaders, of all the other teams throughout the season and tournament, they all proudly hold up their index finger and claim, "We're #1." Even in defeat, most fans will not concede that their team is not the best. That would be like committing the sin of disloyalty. No one holds up nine fingers and comes up with chants and cheers that say, "We are just ok, yea – we are just ok, not that fine, only nine, we are just ok – yea!" Somehow, that does not inspire too many people does it? So, isn't that how it works in religion? Is it okay to cheer for what you like and hope that it is the best and if it brings you some happiness and friends, memories and a sense of connection, well, then that's all that matters – right?

Sometimes we need to step back and examine the obvious. The reason why genuine Christianity claims to be the one and only true religion and what's more, claims to be the very fabric that helps you understand the meaning and purpose to all of life and boldly and joyfully proclaims to be the only way by which your sin can be forgiven and the only way by which you can have eternal life whether you are rich or poor, slave or free, male or female, Asian, Indian, Latino, African, Arab, Jewish or Anglo is because while all other religions can observe the birthday and mark the day of death of their leader, only Christianity looks at the founder of the faith and celebrates His death, burial and

Resurrection! All leaders have a grave. Only one is empty! And what is more, he said that he was going to do that. Now what do you do with that? Predicting your death is one thing. Predicting your resurrection and then fulfilling it is unheard of – except for Christ. But that is because no one is like him. There is only one Jesus Christ. There is only one being who was God and man at the same time. No one lived like him and no one died like him and obviously no one but Christ rose again from the dead. No other religion in the world celebrates Resurrection Day. Jesus Christ is unique, which is why his message is unique. Not all forms of the “Christian religion” are truly Christian. That certainly creates much confusion. However, genuine, true-to-the Bible Christianity is not simply one of the great religions of the world, it is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It’s claims are exclusive because of the uniqueness of Christ. His resurrection is proof of that. No one has ever made the claims that Christ has made and has backed them up. The fact of his resurrection demands that you look carefully at his claims because he lives and lives forevermore, which means you are going to face him, either as Savior, or as Judge.

But let’s be fair. Just because we celebrate his resurrection does not in and of itself mean that it happened. People sing about Santa, but it doesn’t make it true. Our observance of this day does not cause the story to be real, even though our observance may make it seem real to us. The question is; did the resurrection of Christ actually happen? If it didn’t, then we are fools. This is not a game. This is not a nice tradition. This is at once the most significant event in human history or the greatest fraud ever perpetuated. Everything that we believe is leveraged on the reality of the resurrection of Christ.

Romans 10.9-10 – *“If you confess with your mouth that **Jesus is Lord** and believe in your heart that **God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”*

If Christ did not come back to life then we should not only be pitied, we should be outlawed because we are leading thousands of people astray. Many people have understood the double-edged nature of this event. This is all or nothing. It is interesting to see how many books have been written by people who set out to disprove the resurrection of Christ. If you could disprove it, the whole thing falls apart. Over and over they examine the evidence and time after time they concede that the evidence for this is really there. Then they have a problem. The reason they wanted to disprove it is because the message of Christ is so offensive. It’s offensive because it is true and we struggle with that. So, when you discover that Christ really did what he said he would; then what do you do? If Christ really did rise again, then are you willing to face the music? I ask that, even as I pray for your ears to be opened to this because the gospel is the most glorious music that you could ever face, if you will face it by faith. But understand this! There’s no middle ground as far as God is concerned. That means that you are either a whole-hearted, hold-nothing back follower of Christ, or an enemy of the King.

Some of you believe in the resurrection of Christ as a historical event. You are here because it is somewhat important to you and it is what you have grown up believing. It is not something that has yet gripped your life, nor changed you in a profound way, but neither do you deny it. Some of you are here out of curiosity. You are not yet convinced

of the uniqueness of Christ and his exclusive claims to truth and redemption, but you are interested in seeing what we believe and how it stacks up. And finally, some of you bank your entire soul upon this truth. You are convinced of the truthfulness of Christ. That he, God, the Son, was born of a virgin and added to his divine nature a human nature, so that he, now with a human nature could live as the representative of the human race. Therefore, he, as your representative, lived a perfect life, in your place because you could not, and in his death, he offered his perfect life as a substitutionary sacrifice in your place in order to pay for your sins and be the recipient of the just and righteous wrath of God even though you deserved it, he took your place. You believe that. You've trusted in Christ as the only one who could redeem you, and forgive you and make you righteous in the eyes of God.

So, if you are in group one, you are basically a cultural Christian. My aim today is to help you see that simply not rejecting the historical claims of Christ is not saving faith. I want to point you to Christ in such a way that you will bend the knee of your heart before this Savior/King and trust him completely. If you are in group two and you are curious, my aim is to help you see that there is no one who speaks like Christ, because no one has lived like Christ. No one has loved you like Christ, no one can pay for your sins like Christ, no one can save you from the justice of God like Christ, no one can forgive you like Christ, no one rose again like Christ, no one can give you new life like Christ, no one can give you hope and peace and confidence and security like Christ, because no one is God, like Christ. Finally, if you are in group three, my aim is to encourage you with the truthfulness of Christ so that your joy in him abounds and overflows, knowing that because He is who he says he is and has proven that over and over by doing what he says he is going to do, even by rising again from the dead, when this same Jesus says, I'm coming back for you; I'm coming back to reign; I'm coming back to take over, that you can look at your world, and even look at Washington DC and say, that's okay, my older brother, the King is coming back and he is going to fix that mess too.

Now, the reason why I want us to look for a bit at Revelation 1 is because this text and the entire book of Revelation makes it very clear that the resurrection of Christ has enormous future ramifications. Look at verse 17, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." When you read this verse, you see that Christ makes a clear connection between who he is, what he has done and what is the result.

1. **Who is Christ?**

Revelation simply means unveiling. This final book of the Bible is the revealing to the apostle John (and through him to us) of what is going to happen in the future to this world. There is a great amount of detail given in this book, but the bottom line is this: Christ is the Eternal King of the world and he is going to come back to reign over what rightfully belongs to him. That means that every single human being is under the authority of Christ and will face Christ. Christ is more than historically factual; he is a present reality and a future certainty. No one knew this better than John. He was one of Christ's disciples. He watched him die on the cross for our sins. He went to the tomb of

Christ on that Resurrection morning and found it empty. He saw the resurrected Christ with his own eyes. He became a leader in the early church, even at a great cost. His eye witness testimony as recorded in his gospel and epistles along with his willingness to die for this truth is one of the compelling reasons why so many people who attempt to investigate the resurrection in an effort to debunk it, end up becoming convinced by its veracity. How can you explain a guy like John? If the tomb was not empty that morning, why would this guy be willing to give up his life for it? At the time of the writing of this book, he is on an island called Patmos, where he was exiled by the Roman authorities because of his belief and preaching of Christ. While there, Christ reveals himself to him in his glory. John is overwhelmed at what he hears and sees.

Some of what John sees are the human characteristics of Christ. When Christ was on the earth with John, the full reality of Christ's glory was veiled. His righteousness is so glorious that no one would have been able to be near him. So, he hid that. But, even though Christ is God, he is also man; a role he chose in order to save us. Christ is described as looking like "a son of man" (v.13), having hair, eyes (v.14), feet, a voice (v.15), a hand and a face (v.16). But his voice is like that of a trumpet and like the roar of many waters. His hair is white, like snow, while his eyes are like a flame of fire. In his hand are seven stars. Taken together and with the rest of the testimony of Scripture, Jesus Christ is God, who came to this earth as a human and while he lived on this earth, he veiled his glory. He covered his majesty under the veil of a rather ordinary looking human being. But, we are not left to come to this conclusion on our own. Look and listen to what Christ says about himself.

"I am the first and the last and the living one." This statement is a bold declaration of his deity because it was a clear claim to eternity. Like the Father, he was (I am the first), he is (the living one), and is to come (the last). Christ is claiming that he is eternal. He has existed from before time and is forever more. Christ is speaking of his absolute uniqueness and self-sufficiency as well as his unparalleled existence. He is in a league of his own. Christ has no competition and no threats.

Governments are infamous for their bureaucrats. These are the employees who remain in positions of influence regardless of who is elected. Many of their attitudes are: "Look, we were here before you came into office and we will be here long after you are gone. So, you can make your promises and give your speeches, but know this – we aren't changing a thing." Well, that is not the case with Christ. He was here long before you and you cannot outlast him or overthrow him. From eternity he has always been. Christ is eternally relevant. We aren't! We become old news. We become historic. Some of you probably think that I rode a brontosaurus to a one-room school house. I didn't! It was a pterodactyl. Christ is historic, but he is at the same time the most relevant and futuristic person in the universe! But that is not all that Christ says about himself to John. Christ connects who he is, to what he has done. The fact that Christ has always been, is, and will always be, means that what he has done is forever contemporary. That is, since Christ always is eternally in the present, his life and ministry is not only a fact of history, it has great significance for you, today and enormous ramifications for the future. So, how is Christ? He is God, forever and ever. But, what has Christ done?

2. What has he done?

“I died.” (18) Whoa! Wait a minute! How can the eternally existent one, die? Can God die? Well, obviously since the one who died is talking it is clear that he did not stay dead. But, after revealing his true glorious majesty by appearing in stunning array to John it is clear that there is no earthly power that has the capability to take his life. The only way that Christ could ever die was if he would voluntarily give up his life. And that is exactly what he did. He gave up his life for you because our sin is so serious, that the payment that has to be made for sin is death. Only a perfect payment could be made in our place that would spare us from death. But no human being could make that payment because no human being is perfect.

I was talking with a guy who works in a high-tech design and engineering firm that does work for NASA and the military. He was telling me that even though equipment can be built with very, very exacting standards, even so things are built with tolerances. In other words, no one can build something that is going to be absolutely perfect in the purest sense of the word, so things are built to fit within a range. God does not give us a range to shoot for. God is absolutely righteous and demands absolute perfection, which we can never reach. Our sin makes us guilty. We need to be rescued and since it was the first human who sinned and cursed the human race, that means that since a human caused the problem a human has to fix it. That is why it was necessary for God to become a man so that he could fully represent us in his life and death. As God, he was perfect. As man he could live in our place and then die for us. As God, no one could take his life, he laid it down. As a man, he could die as our representative. As God, he was perfect. As a man, he could die in our place. As the God man, he laid down his perfect life as our representative so that we could exchange our sin for his righteousness.

How do we know that it worked? How do we know that the price he paid was enough? “I am alive forevermore.” The resurrection of Christ is the proof that God the Father accepted the payment for our sin in full.

3. What is the result?

He lives forever and will reign on the earth. Because of his resurrection and authority, Christ holds the keys to Death and Hades. That means that Christ is King over death and the realm of the dead. Keys can lock and unlock. Everything is under his control. Your very breath is ordained by him. Now, because he is God, he could simply demand that you obey him and he has that right. But he calls you to love him, trust him, follow him, give your life to him because no one else can pay for your sin. No one else can save you from hell. No one else can pardon you full and free. No one else can offer you a salvation that is final and true and forever. No one else can give you eternal life because no one else rose again and lived forever. Why do you think Christ said to John, “fear not”? When you trust Christ, all reason for fear is really taken away; particularly, the fear of death. Trust Christ! Trust in Christ alone as your Savior and as your King!

Romans 10.9-10 – “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”