

## “Time to Celebrate”

April 16, 2017

Luke 24:1-12

### I. Introduction

In the so-called Christian countries of the world, a terrible thing has happened—the God of the Bible has been replaced by the god of good intentions. A common phrase a couple of years ago was “the dumbing down of America” and that is seen in the understanding of Christianity as well as in many other things. I’m afraid that for many people today, Easter—Resurrection Sunday is just a time to celebrate spring with candy, Easter eggs, chocolate bunnies, and flowers. In our politically correct world, in this so called enlightened age, the significance of Jesus and His Resurrection have been relegated to things that have outlived their importance like flip phones, dial telephones, wringer washing machines, and gourmet meals on planes. Now all that is important is “being sincere.” Sadly, Christians are falling into this trap, too.

In **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** we read, “**For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.**” The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The resurrection isn’t a postscript or an afterthought to the life of Christ; it is the culminating climax of His atoning work. In the Book of Acts, the church gave witness primarily to the resurrection; e.g. **Acts 4:33** says, “**With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was open to them all.**” Every sermon in the Book of Acts was a message on the resurrection. So this morning, I would like to consider some basic questions about Jesus and the Resurrection.

### II. Some Basic Questions

**A. Who was Jesus?** The first question we need to ask is, “*Who was Jesus?*” Obviously, He must have been important. Until recently in historical dating, we had **BC** which stood for “*before Christ*” and **AD** which stood for “*anno Domini*” which is Latin for “*in the year of our Lord.*” In other words, we measured the years and centuries backwards and forwards from the date of the traditional birth of Jesus Christ. Now in our politically correct century, we have **BCE** (“*before the common era*”) and **CE** (“*common era*”), but they are really identical to **BC** and **AD**. As William Shakespeare wrote, “*A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.*” So Jesus was important enough to leave a mark on history—but “Who was He?”

The Apostle John tells us who Jesus was. [Turn to John 1:1-5, 10-14.](#) In our enlightened age, people say that Jesus was a good man and a good teacher, but He never claimed to be God—just His disciples did. They are wrong—sincerely wrong—for example in [John 10:30](#), Jesus said, “**I and the Father are one.**” In [John 20:28](#), a week after Jesus’ resurrection, Thomas saw Him for the 1<sup>st</sup> time and called Him, “**My Lord and my God**” and Jesus didn’t correct him. The Bible claims and Jesus claimed that He was and is God, the Creator of all things.

The Bible explains how an omnipotent God could come to earth, [turn to Philippians 2:5-8.](#) In other words, Jesus willingly laid aside His Godly attributes and became a man who got dirty and tired and hungry. Jesus was fully man; yet, somehow, He remained fully God. Jesus entered the realm of those who are time and space creatures—human beings—and lived life like those He created. It’s for this reason that He understands what we are going through. Jesus was fully man and fully God; He was God in human form; He was God incarnate.

C.S. Lewis addressed the question of “Who was Jesus” in his book “*Mere Christianity.*” He wrote, “*A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*”

**B.** The next question is: **When and why did He come?** In the Book of Galatians we see the “when” and the “why” He came to earth. [Turn to Galatians 4:4-5.](#) At the time determined by God—at just the right time, Jesus was born of a virgin in the little village of Bethlehem. When did Jesus come? – At just the right time. In [Mark 10:45](#) Jesus said, “**The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**” Paul wrote in [Ephesians 5:2](#) that Jesus Christ “**gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**” Why did Jesus come?—Jesus came to redeem or save the world.

There’s another part to this “why.” [Romans 3:23](#) says “**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” In [John 3:16](#) Jesus said, “**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**” Because of God’s love, Jesus had to come. This is the second half of “why”—because of God’s love.

You see every person in this room, every person in the world has sinned. Have you ever told a lie—even a little “white” lie? That’s a sin. Do you know what that makes you? It makes you a liar. Have you ever taken anything that didn’t belong to you—even something small like a pencil or a paperclip or time that belonged to someone else—like an employer? That’s a sin and what does that make you? It makes you a thief. I could go on, but I think you get the point. Each and every person is a sinner. In the 1<sup>st</sup> half of **Romans 6:23** we are told that “**the wages of sin is death.**” Since God is perfect and heaven is perfect, imperfect beings, sinners like you and me cannot enter heaven or come into God’s presence. Without redemption, without being purified, sinful beings will spend eternity in hell. As **Revelation 20:15** puts it, “**If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**” At the right time, Jesus came to redeem the world. God’s love for mankind made Him come.

**C. So What did Jesus do?** God is a God of love, BUT He is also a God of justice, so if you are going to be saved from hell, someone else has to pay the penalty for your sins. This is what Jesus did—He paid the penalty for your sins and my sins. **Turn to Romans 4:23-25.** As a different translation puts it: “**Jesus was given to die for our sins, and he was raised from the dead to make us right with God**” (NCV). Jesus died for your sins. He paid your penalty. But just dying wasn’t enough; a lot of people—good and bad—die. Death is the result of sin. Jesus, the Son of God, had to rise again from the dead; otherwise, He was no different from anyone else. What did Jesus do?—He paid the penalty for sin; He died and then rose again.

That’s what Jesus predicted. In **Matthew 16:21** we read, “**From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**” As well as fulfilling His prophesy, in **1 Corinthians 15:17** Paul wrote “**if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.**” The resurrection of Jesus Christ—the resurrection we are celebrating today—was proof that His sacrifice was accepted by God. **2 Timothy 1:10** says, Jesus “**has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.**” Or as the Apostle Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:3-4** “**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**” Jesus has conquered death and has given us the opportunity to have eternal life through His death and resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection proved His power over sin and death.

**D. Finally, How can we have hope?** How can we have assurance that when we die, we will go to heaven? Being sincere isn’t enough, having the best intentions isn’t enough. You can be sincerely

wrong. [John 3:36](#) says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.” [Acts 4:12](#) says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Over and over the Bible says—not Pastor Steve, not Tabernacle Baptist Church—the Bible says that there is only one way to heaven— [Acts 16:31](#) says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”

Earlier I quoted the first part of [Romans 6:23](#) which said that “the wages of sin is death.” The 2<sup>nd</sup> part says that “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” What is a gift? Isn’t a gift something that is given by someone to someone else because they want to give something special to that person; a gift isn’t earned. The gift of eternal life—an eternity in heaven and not in hell—isn’t earned. You see, no matter how good a person is, he or she isn’t ever going to be perfect. They will sin and on their own they can’t work hard enough to earn eternal life. Turn to [Ephesians 2:8-9](#). The only way one can be saved—saved from an eternity in hell is through faith in Jesus Christ. Like any other gift, you just have to reach out and take it.

[Romans 10:9](#) tells us what “*faith in Jesus Christ*” means; it says “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” You can have hope if Jesus is your Lord and your Savior. If you’ve made Jesus your Lord and Savior, then Easter is a time to celebrate. Your sins have been forgiven. You have God’s promise which we read earlier in [John 1:12](#): “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” As we are told in [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#), when we leave this earth, whether through death or by the rapture, “we will be with the Lord forever.” Hard as it may be to grasp – or understand, we will spend eternity in the new heaven and the new earth. All this is true because the sinless Son of God came to earth in human form at the right time, died on the cross as a sacrifice for sins and rose from the dead 3 days later. He is risen! He is risen indeed!!

### **III. Conclusion**

One of the problems of Jesus’ resurrection is that some people try to make sense out of everything that happened. They try to understand exactly how Jesus could die and then come back to life again. Let me tell you something—it’s a secret, let me whisper it: “None of it makes any sense.” Think about it from a rational, logical, analytical viewpoint. Does it make sense that a man can be dead for 3 days and come back to life? No, it doesn’t make any sense. But really how much of life makes sense? Look at the headlines over the past several weeks. We have a drug epidemic—people are overdosing while driving with their children or grandchildren in their cars. Suicide bombers kill

themselves and others. Although they know smoking causes cancer and other issues, people continue to smoke. Life doesn't make sense.

Charles Colson, the former counsel of President Nixon, a convicted conspirator in the Watergate scandal, wrote that the Watergate cover up was the final straw convincing him Jesus was raised from the dead. He wrote — *“There were only 8 or 10 of us in the inner circle around the president who really knew what was going on. All we had to do was stonewall for a couple of months and the Watergate scandal would be over. We had all the power and prestige of the presidency at our fingertips. And if the truth broke there would be embarrassment and perhaps a prison sentence. There was no grave danger, our lives were not threatened, but we couldn't hold the conspiracy together for more than 3 weeks. We could not contain the lie. Once prosecution was possible, the natural instincts of self preservation were so overwhelming that one by one the conspirators caved in and stood in line at the prosecutor's office to escape jail.”*

*Colson concludes, “I know that the disciples could not perpetuate a lie like the resurrection, because it was not just their reputations that were at stake, their lives were in danger. They had no clout, they had nothing to gain by the lie, and yet every one of them stood fast in the conviction that Jesus was alive. Take it from one who saw firsthand how vulnerable a cover up is: nothing less than a witness as awesome as the resurrected Christ could have caused those men to maintain to their dying whispers that Jesus is alive and He is Lord! Each apostle, except for John, died a martyr's death.”*

Think about it, the Apostles died rather than recant their belief in the resurrection. I doubt that the disciples would have died for a lie. Would you die for a lie? History has shown people will give their lives for what they believe is true, but not for what they know is false. The lives and gruesome deaths of those early Christians are examples—undeniable proof of their belief in what they had seen and believed. This is on what we base our hope and faith. He is risen!

Intellectual acknowledgement of the historical fact of Jesus' resurrection is necessary to be saved, but in itself such knowledge is not sufficient to save. **James 2:19** says, **“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.”** Saving faith goes beyond a mental affirmation of the facts; it must instill in one's heart love for Christ and submission to His will in obedience to Him as sovereign Lord. As **Romans 10:9** says, **“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”** For believers, the fear of death is removed and the hope of glory is assured by Jesus' resurrection. He has conquered the grave and promised the same victory to all who embrace Him in saving faith. If you are a believer, today is a day to celebrate: Jesus Christ the Son of God is risen. He is risen indeed!

