

THE FIRST RESURRECTION SERMON

Acts 2:22-24; 36-38

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity is rooted in history or it isn't true. We believe the stories in the Bible really happened. The people are real, not made up.

- Adam and Eve were real people.
- Moses was a real man.
- David was a real king.
- Mary really lived.
- Jesus really lived.

The places are real. From the Garden to the Red Sea to Mt. Sinai to the Jordan River to Bethlehem to Jerusalem. All of these were/are real places. The events that happened in these locations didn't happen in a far off world. They happened in our world. The time periods are real, not fabricated.

- There was a time before the earth was formed
- There was a time the earth was formed
- There was the time of the flood
- There was a time when Israel was held captive by Egypt
- There was a time when David ruled over Israel.
- There was a time when Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians and Judah by the Babylonians.
- There was a time when Jesus was born.
- There was a time when Paul spread the gospel around the world.

Every truth claim that Christians make has a historical root. For example, we believe the gospel. The gospel is fundamentally news—news about something that really happened. And the news has a history. A certain man did a certain thing in a certain place at a certain time. And it changed this world.

This morning, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. And we believe that too really happened. We believe it is historical. We don't believe it is a myth or an invented story. There's no significance to the resurrection of Jesus unless there was a resurrection of Jesus. One writer of the Scriptures says it this way: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). In other words, if Jesus didn't really rise from the dead—if that's not historical, if it's just a myth—then Christianity isn't true. And if Christianity isn't true, that same writer says, "we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19).

The first Christians believed in the resurrection of Jesus. The reason they believed in the resurrection was that they were eye-witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

In fact, had they not believed in the resurrection of Jesus, there never would have been a Christianity. They would have returned to their former way of life and belief systems. The resurrection is “the cornerstone of all Christian truth.” Belief in the resurrection is required in order to be truly a Christian.

Ro 10:9: "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."

If you don't do that, you're not saved. If you don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead, you're not saved and you're not a Christian.

On the day that the church was born, only about 7 weeks after Jesus' resurrection, the world's first Christian sermon was preached. It was preached by a follower of Christ named Peter on a Sunday morning. And the theme of the sermon was the resurrection of Jesus. It was the world's first resurrection sermon. And this morning, I'd like us to study a part of this sermon in Acts 2. We don't have time to study the entire sermon this morning. So we'll focus our attention on about 6 verses.

Acts 2:22-24 ²²“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Acts 2:36-38 ³⁶Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So these verses contain the main idea or theme of Peter's sermon. The theme is the resurrection of Jesus. As we celebrate Jesus' resurrection this morning, we want to contemplate the resurrection by considering two points that Peter makes in his sermon.

We start with his first point. . .

I. THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION

In order to have a resurrection, someone first must live, then die, then rise from the dead. That's a resurrection story. And that's exactly how Peter lays out his sermon. He demonstrates the reality of the resurrection preaching that Jesus truly lived (v. 22), then Jesus truly died (v. 23), then Jesus truly rose from the dead (v. 24). Let's look at each one of these in turn.

First. . .

A. JESUS TRULY LIVED

Ac 2:22: "“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—"

Peter is laying a foundation that Jesus truly lived. To prove his point, Peter gives several lines of evidence.

1. The Evidence of Jesus' Humanity

He begins this part of the sermon: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man. . .” So you’ve got a statement about his hometown and a statement about his nature.

Jesus’ **hometown** was Nazareth.

- That’s where Mary lived before she and Joseph went to Bethlehem.
- After Jesus was born, his family had to flee to Egypt for a time in order to escape death.
- And when they came back from Egypt, they settled again in Nazareth.

Nazareth was an obscure village in a region north of Jerusalem called Galilee. It was a village that wasn’t thought highly of. When Nathanael (who would become one of the apostles) first heard about Jesus and where he was from, he said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” As a place, Nazareth was so unimportant to the Jews, it’s not mentioned anywhere in the OT. The first mention of it in Scripture is in Jesus’ birth stories. And yet, this is where our Savior grew up. No one who wanted to be highly thought of would choose Nazareth as their hometown. It doesn’t add to your resume. So you wouldn’t claim to be from there unless you were actually from there.

Because Nazareth was a real place, any skeptic of Jesus’ day who wanted to know if Jesus was really from there, could go there. It was just a relatively small village—so you could easily find out if Jesus truly was from there. You could go there and ask around—did anyone know his family? Do you remember Jesus? And, of course, had anyone done that, they would have found lots of evidence that he was from there. The whole town tried to throw him off the cliff (Luke 4). You’d remember that! So evidence of Jesus’ humanity is his hometown. He really lived somewhere.

Further evidence of Jesus’ humanity is that Peter calls Jesus “a man.” And that he was. Jesus was and is fully human, just as we are.

- He wasn’t a phantom.
- He wasn’t an angel.
- He wasn’t divine energy.
- He was a man.
- You could see him. You could touch him. He was really real.

He isn’t only man. Jesus is—just as Thomas confesses after Jesus’ resurrection—“my Lord and my {God}.” Jesus is the God-man. Fully God and fully man. But his life was verifiable. He lived. . . as evidenced by his humanity.

A second line of evidence that Jesus truly lived was. . .

2. The Evidence of Jesus' Miracles

v. 22: "a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him"

That word "attested" essentially means "authenticated by demonstration." It's to prove true. Jesus was proven to be who he said he was by God the Father working through him "mighty works and wonders and signs."

- Mighty works are miracles
- Wonders are people's response to those miracles
- Signs are what the miracles are pointing to.

The miracles of Jesus validated that he was the Messiah, the Christ who had come. The fame of Jesus spread far beyond his hometown.

Mt 4:25: "And great crowds followed [Jesus] from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan."

People came from far away to find Jesus and be healed. Throughout his ministry, there were literally 10s of thousands of witnesses to Jesus' life because they were drawn by the miracles.

So the first line of evidence that Jesus truly lived was Jesus' humanity, the second was Jesus' miracles. . . a third line of evidence that Jesus truly lived was. . .

3. The Evidence of the Jesus' Reputation

Peter is saying to the crowd, you know he truly lived.

- You know he did these miracles.
- You saw them. You heard of them.
- He did them here among you.
- There are 10s of thousands of eye-witnesses to what Jesus did.

You yourselves know enough to believe that Jesus is the Christ. You have no excuse. Jesus truly lived. The reality of the resurrection begins with the truth that Jesus truly lived.

A second truth is that . .

B. JESUS TRULY DIED

Ac 2:23: "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

Just as Jesus really lived. Jesus really died. There are three words for his death in this verse: "delivered up. . . crucified. . . killed." **Delivered up** means that Jesus was betrayed and handed over to his enemies. Judas, one of the 12 disciples, sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

That was the price of a slave. For the price of a slave, Judas sold Jesus into the hands of the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. But this was the design of God. All this was “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” We don’t have time to plumb the depths of that phrase, but suffice it to say:

- God the Father orchestrated it.
- God the Father wasn’t surprised by it.
- God the Father predestined ahead of time all that would take place.
- God the Father planned it.

Once he was delivered up, Jesus was crucified.

Crucifixion is perhaps the cruelest of execution methods. The Romans learned it from the Persians, who would impale a victim on a pole. The Romans perfected the art of crucifixion. It had become one of their favorite means of execution in order to make a public spectacle. They had learned how to prolong the agony and increase the horror of those watching. Often it would take 3 days for a person to die.

For Jesus, it took only 6 hours.

- He was crucified around 9 a.m.
- By about 3 p.m. he was dead.
- Matthew says, “He yielded up his spirit” (27:50)
- Mark says, “He breathed his last” (15:37)
- Luke adds that Jesus said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ And having said this he breathed his last” (23:46).
- John says, “Jesus said, “It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (19:30).

Jesus Christ, the God-man, was **killed**.

- Not because of any crime he committed. He was innocent.
- Not because of any sin of his own. He was sinless.

But dead, nonetheless.

Why?

Two reasons that v. 23 hints at.

One was that “lawless men” hated him. A conspiracy occurred between two groups normally at odds and rivals: the Jews and Romans conspired to kill Jesus on trumped up charges of blasphemy. They made up a crime to charge Jesus and order his execution. But it was *they* who committed the greatest crime in history, by slaying the Son of God. One theologian has written: “The essence of the crime against Jesus was not the ending of his physical life. The essence of the crime against Jesus was the rejection of God in Jesus’ life” (Piper, *Did You Kill the Lord of Glory?*). In other words, it was one thing to end Jesus’ physical life.

It's far greater culpability to reject *God* who worked through Jesus' life. And that's what they did.

God worked miracles through Jesus and they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons" (Matt 12:24). They attributed his works to Satan, not to God. They killed Jesus because they rejected God. They hated God, so they killed the Son of God. Which is why Peter can say to a whole crowd who had nothing to do with ending Jesus' physical life: "this Jesus. . . YOU crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Well, what did they have to do with it, Peter?

This: if you reject God's endorsement of Jesus—that Jesus is truly the God-man, the Christ, the Savior of the world—then you cast your vote with those who stood there on that Friday and cried out, "Crucify him!" Who do you side with?

- Do you agree with God about Jesus?
- Or do you agree with the crowds about Jesus?

Unless you acknowledge Jesus for who he is—very God and very man—the Lord and Savior who you must obey and trust—then you stand with the crowds who called for Jesus' death and crucifixion. Jesus dies because of godless people.

And there's a **second reason** why Jesus died hinted at by this verse. And it's again in the words, "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." As we said, God had a plan. And the plan was to rescue sinful humanity from his own righteous wrath.

Disobeying God is called sin. Sin—like all crimes—deserves a just punishment. A penalty must be paid. God must punish sinners for their sins because his honor has been defamed. As our Creator, he made us.

- He have rebelled against him.
- So a penalty must be paid.
- Justice must be done.

Because of God's mercy for us, he made a loving plan. The plan was for Jesus to become a man; live a perfect, sinless life; and die on a cross to pay the penalty for all who trust him. This is the plan of God. And so Jesus died to become our substitute on the cross. Rather than me dying for my sin, he dies for my sin. And I gain his righteousness, if I believe in him. So there are two actors in Jesus' death. We killed him because of our rebellion against God. And God the Father planned that Jesus would die in order to rescue us.

Throughout history, there have been skeptics who've denied that Jesus really died. Perhaps he fainted on the cross, they say. The reason they deny he died is to deny that he rose from the dead. To say it another way, in an effort to deny that Jesus rose from the dead, they deny that he ever died at all. But the crowds before Peter knew Jesus died. The Romans wouldn't allow a person to merely faint in a crucifixion. They had perfected their killing machinations.

- The centurion guarding the cross affirmed he was dead.

- The crowds gathered knew he was dead and left in grief.
- Pilate confirmed that Jesus was dead.
- Joseph of Arimathea—a righteous man—knew Jesus was dead—he put him in the tomb and sealed it.
- The women who accompanied Jesus' body to the tomb knew he died.
- Even the Jesus leaders knew—they paid the soldiers to lie about what happened to his body.

These eyewitnesses of his death would never collude and make up his death. Most of them were glad he was dead. Jesus died and everyone knew it. The reality of the resurrection begins with the truth that Jesus truly lived and second that Jesus truly died. Third. . .

C. JESUS TRULY ROSE FROM THE DEAD

Ac 2:24: "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it."

Death couldn't keep Jesus dead. Jesus' power is greater than death. For the rest of humanity, death is the ultimate foe. No matter how you live your life—how healthily you eat, how much you workout, how careful you are—eventually you die. Eventually death beats you. Medical advances and human ingenuity will never overcome death. It's greater in power than any man. But not the God-man.

I saw this on Instagram yesterday. It's a note: "Dear Death, On Friday, you weren't attending my funeral—you were attending yours. Sincerely, Jesus."

Jesus rose from the grave. The stone wasn't rolled away so that Jesus could get out. It was rolled away so that we could see through eyes of the women and men who were there that day—faithful eyewitnesses who loved Jesus and grieved at his death—who went into the tomb and all testify to us the same thing: that the tomb was empty and he was not there, he is risen.

And after that, the Scriptures tell us that over 500 people were eye-witnesses of his resurrection. Saw him, talked with him, touched him, ate with him. Over 500 witnesses all saying the same thing. Jesus overcame death and, in doing so, defeated death for us.

For all in Christ, though we may die physically—our soul lives on and one day, we receive back our resurrected bodies as we live on with Jesus—life everlasting. So this is the true story of the resurrection: Jesus truly lived; Jesus truly died; Jesus truly rose from the dead. The resurrection is true. So what should be our response to the reality of the resurrection?

In vv. 36-38, we see the second point of Peter's sermon: the proper response to the resurrection.

II. THE RESPONSE TO THE RESURRECTION

Ac 2:36-38: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said

to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

A sinner under the judgment of God can have only one appropriate response: They are to repent. The word repentance in the New Testament comes from the Greek word *metanoew* [meta-nah-EH-oh]. The word is made up of two parts: *meta* and *noew*. *Meta* means movement or change. *Noew* refers to the mind with an emphasis on thoughts and purposes. So the word basically means to change your mind or purposes. So repentance means to change your mind about sin. You see sin as God sees it. You see the sinfulness of sin. That it offends our Holy God. That sin ought not to be done. And we know that sin comes from the heart:

Mt 15:19: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."

So true repentance includes having a change of heart about sin. You don't see it as desirable. You don't crave it. You don't entertain it. You don't seek it out. And, of course, changing our mind and changing our heart about sin will change our behavior. Changed behavior gives evidence that you've truly repented. To use the Bible's words: it's bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. So we must chart a different course.

Now, if you're going to turn from sin, you must turn to something else. And the something is a someone. We must embrace Jesus:

Jn 1:12: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"

We turn from our sin and turn to Jesus. We embrace him for who he is and what he's done on our behalf. We trust in him that his death—and his death alone—saves us from the penalty of our sin. Trusting him that he became our substitute on the cross. That's called faith.

So turning from sin is called repentance. Turning to embrace Jesus is called faith. And this is how we're saved.

That's what Peter means by the word, "Repent." Baptism is the outward symbol of our inward repentance. Getting baptized under water doesn't save us. But it is the public demonstration of our faith. God washes away our sin and raises us to new life. And the going under the water and coming up, symbols that spiritual reality.

CONCLUSION

So what's your response to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus? The crowd that gathered to hear Peter was evidently quite large.

Ac 2:41: "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."

"Those who received his word" means they believed what he taught was truth. Is God awakening in you—perhaps for the first time—the truthfulness of the gospel of the resurrection?

- Have you confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believed in your heart that God raised him from the dead?
- Is the Spirit of God prompting you to turn from your sin and embrace Christ as the one who will save you from your sin?

If so, go to Jesus. Repent right now and look to Jesus as your Savior. Jesus himself said, "whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (Jn 6:37). He will not reject you, if you come to him faith. And you, this morning, on Easter, will receive eternal life and will be resurrected to live with Jesus forever.