

Believing in Christ: The Resurrection

SERMON · The Passion, Cross and Resurrection · 29 April 2018 (the Fourth Sunday after Easter)

1 Corinthians 15:14 (quoted)

John 11:25 (quoted twice)

John 11:21 (quoted)

John 11:17-28

On this Fourth Sunday after Easter, we continue with our thoughts on the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The theme given to us for this Sunday is ‘Believing in Christ’, with reference to the Resurrection. Last Sunday, a fellow minister spoke to us about the need to have the Resurrection experience in our lives, so that we may perceive Jesus; that very same Resurrection experience will also give us the strong credence to believe in Jesus Christ. I would like to proceed with the conviction that the resurrection of our Lord happened in real, historical time. It was an actual event. Jesus died on the Cross, He was buried in a tomb, and He was raised from the dead on the third day. This, then, should form the basis of our compelling faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us spend some moments contemplating the Resurrection itself. For centuries, many of the world’s distinguished philosophers have assaulted Christianity as being irrational, superstitious, and absurd, because of our claim of the Resurrection of Christ. Many have chosen simply to ignore this central issue; others have tried to explain it away through various theories. Having said that, one cannot disclaim death. Death stands at the end of the pathway of every human life, firm, inevitable, and final; rich, poor, sick, and healthy, all alike must face it someday. For most people, death strikes fear and terror. But for those who believe in Jesus Christ, there is a sharp difference: they do not need to fear death, because they have put their trust in the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. The religions of the world try to help people cope with their mortality, but they can offer virtually nothing; all of their founders lie dead and buried to this day. How completely different Christianity is! In the face of the great fact of death, it announces an even greater fact: our Lord is a living God. Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and because He lives, we too shall live.

Like the philosophers, scientists have been at odds with theologians and preachers throughout history. Scientists, as a matter of fact, have tried to make it impossible to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus, as described in the New Testament and as traditionally interpreted by the Church. Paul hit the nail on the head in 1 Corinthians 15:14, when he wrote: “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” Well, now we get into a bind here. The problem is that science can only accept events that are reproducible: they must be observable many times, or by many people, and even so run

the risk of being rejected if they are not well preceded, or explainable by existing theories. The Resurrection of Jesus, therefore, cannot be considered scientifically, because it has never been claimed to be a reproducible event. Jesus is unique, the Man who is also God, and His Resurrection will not be reproduced until the end of history.

Even if we go by their own theory, say on the Big Bang, we find that it can support our belief that, yes, the resurrection of our Lord did occur, as all things are possible for God. They say only a particle of an atom is required to create an entire universe: make it sufficiently dense, and then cause it to suddenly expand, and, presto, we have a universe. If that is how God performed the creation, so be it, to put an argument to rest. Extend this line of thinking further, and we might argue that all God had to do was take a particle of an atom of the crucified, dead, and buried Jesus Christ, and cause it to expand into the resurrected Lord. This remains, of course, only a speculative and illustrative comparison, not a scientific account of the Resurrection itself; we will leave it at that for today.

As amazing and as vital as the Resurrection is to Christian belief, Jesus is more than One who was raised from the dead. He is more than the historic event; He is more than a risen Saviour. He is all that which He described in His 'I am' statements, and the statement in focus today is His statement to Martha, read to us from John 11:25: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." In these 'I am' statements, Jesus declares something about Himself corresponding to His being the Divine Messiah promised by God the Father.

The greatest freedom a person can have is to let go of their soul, placing it in the hands of Jesus Christ, safe and secure. We struggle in this life so much because we are afraid to trust Jesus completely; we worry, and are anxious about so many things, when the real and most important commodity we possess is our soul. The question before us this evening is: will you trust Jesus with your soul? As Jesus entrusted Himself to His Father, we must entrust ourselves to Jesus. Believing in the resurrection of Christ leads us to trust Jesus with our soul when we die. I pray today that this truth from John will remind us that Jesus is Lord of the resurrection, His and ours. Jesus can be trusted; do you truly trust Him?

Reading through the narrative about the raising of Lazarus from the dead, I get a picture that Martha had believed some things correctly about Jesus; she had believed correctly about the general resurrection at the last day, yet her faith fell short. She thought that Jesus was somehow limited by space and time. I cannot find any fault with her, for she did not know that Jesus is in space, and space is in Him; she also thought that His power came only

from God the Father, having no inclination yet of the Trinity. Martha's statement, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21), shows that she believed Jesus had to be physically present to heal her brother.

We must understand that when I say Jesus is more than a resurrected Saviour, what I mean is that Jesus is not simply the Saviour who was resurrected: He is the resurrection. Notice, too, that our Lord does not stop there. He also states, "I am the resurrection, and the life." How does Jesus explain His two claims? He tells us some amazing truths: "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Because Jesus is God, and because He is the resurrection, or, literally, the Lord of the resurrection, His claim is absolutely true. In the context, we have Jesus speaking with Martha about Lazarus, but what is true of Lazarus is true universally: everyone who believes in Jesus, even if they die, will live again. Lazarus, of course, at the time of their dialogue is dead, but all that Jesus, the Lord of the resurrection and the Lord of life, has to do is to speak the word, the same word that nothingness heard at the beginning, when everything came into being. God the Son had spoken the word, and a dead Lazarus responded, and was restored to life; his, however, was not a resurrection.

Many people believe only in the historical facts of Christ's death and resurrection. They believe He died in a generic way for the human race, but they have never committed their personal faith to Jesus Christ alone; they have never personally relied on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Belief in Jesus Christ can be accurately expressed as a definite decision, or choice of a person's will, to commit their faith to Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Belief, or simple faith, means reliance or trust: when a person relies on or trusts another to accomplish a specific task for them, they are committing themselves to that person wholeheartedly. Belief can be expressed as a personal commitment, a handing over, a turning over, of an individual's faith to Jesus Christ alone; it is a commitment of one's faith to the death and resurrection of Christ for salvation, or, in simple terms, for the specific purpose of providing the person with the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from hell, and the gift of eternal life.

The lessons we learn today, then, are these: that we must have the Resurrection experience, in order to perceive and believe in Jesus Christ, an experience that can be ours only when we accept and believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; that Jesus is more than One who was raised from the dead, for He is the Lord of Resurrection and Life; that our trust in Jesus has to be so intense that we commit our most precious possession, our soul, into His care;

and that this will result in an unwavering belief in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, and the gift of eternal life in His new creation.

Martha rejoiced in the resurrection; Lazarus rejoiced; the Apostle Paul, and others, rejoiced also. The angels in heaven, too, give God glory for the resurrection. I pray that we, too, may rejoice when we read our Lord's words, "I am the resurrection, and the life."

Let us pray.

Almighty God, You have exalted Jesus Christ, and made Him Lord of all. Give us faith and courage to believe and follow our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the source of our eternal life. Open our eyes, and help us to overcome our unbelief and unfaithfulness, so that we may also witness and proclaim His life and His redemptive acts, through our words and deeds; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.