

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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The Message of Easter

A Buried Focus

Years ago in New York, a Jewish couple threw a party to commemorate the circumcision of their newborn son. It was winter, and so, as the guests arrived one by one, their coats were placed on the bed in the master bedroom. When the time arrived for the presentation of the child and his circumcision, a ghastly discovery was made. The child had been placed on the master bed for a nap and so was suffocated beneath the coats of the guests!

Such has been the fate of the Message of Easter in our land; it too has been buried! Between Easter Bunnies and egg hunts, from the skeptics to the agnostics the Message of Easter no longer can be heard today.

And what is the Message of Easter?

In a word it is “Resurrection.” Easter is the commemoration and the celebration of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Now whether you realize it or not, this is the heart and soul of Christianity. John Locke, the 18th-century British philosopher, said, “Our Savior's resurrection is truly of great importance in Christianity, so great that His being or not being the Messiah stands or falls with it.”

Truly without the resurrection, Jesus is not the Messiah!

And so it behooves us to take some time to consider this seminal doctrine of the church: The Message of Easter and the Resurrection of Christ! Let's begin where Paul does in our text, noting first off that this message is a message of folly.

A Message of Folly

1 Corinthians 15:20, “**But now¹ is Christ risen from the dead**, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

When we read this little phrase, “But now...,” we are drawn back in our reading to what was said before, specifically: “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there

¹ δε νυνι de nuni now, at this very moment

is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Corinthians 15:12).

At the time of the writing of this Epistle, the church in Corinth had been infiltrated by self-designated “super-apostles.”² Not only did they mock Paul, but they also mocked many things in the kingdom of God... including the doctrine of the resurrection. To them the idea of anyone rising from the dead was fanciful. It was beyond their imagination, human experience, and belief. However they still maintained that they were followers of Christ.

That sounds like a lot of people today in the US. Doesn't it?

If you asked most people they would say that while Egypt is a Muslim nation, and Japan is a Buddhist nation and Israel is a Jewish nation the United States is still a Christian nation. And yet, when it comes down to it most do not believe the Bible today. At best, Jesus is viewed as a morally upright man. And any notion of miracles, judgment, the virgin birth, the need for salvation, and the resurrection goes beyond their imagination, human experience, and belief.

Perhaps there are some here this day who hold this view: That Jesus saving people from hell sounds archaic, old-fashioned and out of touch with reality.

”I don't need a crutch to get through life; I'll stand on my own two feet,” is the sentiment of many. And yet, based on this passage, I'm not surprised. Even in Paul's day the resurrection met with unbelief.

Matthew 22:23, “The same day came to him [to Jesus] the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him.”

Acts 17:32, “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.”

1 Corinthians 15:12, “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

In fact, it wasn't just the resurrection, it was almost everything related to Christ. God Himself said, “for the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Do you see?

A person who is perishing in their sin will always look at Christ, the Bible, and Christianity and say folly! Archaic! Don't bother me with that stuff! Is it any surprise then that Easter and the Resurrection are looked upon as folly in our day?

1 Corinthians 2:14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

This takes it one step further. The one perishing not only doesn't believe, but on his own he can't believe! In fact according to Ephesians 2, they are “dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in [they] walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now

² Compare 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

worketh in the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1-2).

And so again, I am not surprised that there might be some this day who doubt the first Easter brought many doubters. Why should our day be any different?

Ah, but here is where it gets good. For if you have ears to hear, you will see from this text that the Message of Easter also is a message of certainty.

Message of Certainty

1 Corinthians 15:20, “**But now is Christ risen from the dead**, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

Notice the certainty of this statement! It brings no doubts. It allows not second guessing. It is a strong statement of certitude!

And let me tell you, in light of the context, this is a bold statement. The “Super-Apostles” at Corinth had shot down much of what Paul already had said on prior occasions. How is it then that Paul could speak with such certainty?

Paul has two lines of reasoning for this claim in this chapter: One based on Logic, the other based on History. Let's begin with the logical proof.

Logical Proof of the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:13, “But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:.”

Now in verses 14-16 Paul discusses the implications of this on his preaching. While this is good, nevertheless for our sakes, we will skip to verse 17.

1 Corinthians 15:17-19, “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

Do you see the inconsistency of claiming to be a Christian, a Christian nation and yet rejecting the resurrection of Christ? If Christ has not risen from the dead, then according to Paul we are still in our sins! All who have died before us are in hell! And everyone in this church is a fool!

Let me explain this. According to the opening chapters of Genesis, when God created this world, He fashioned man in His own image and entered into a relationship with him wherein He talked with Adam and Eve. He walked with them. And we call this a covenant.

Now as glorious as this was, nevertheless it brought with it grave responsibility. Specifically, this covenant requires us to uphold our end of the bargain. If we fail in our responsibility³ then we must suffer the consequences of death and hell!

Unfortunately, man failed in his duties to uphold the covenant. We rebelled against God! We cast off His

³ This being either God or man; and God cannot fail .

rule! We opted to go it alone! And the reward that we receive for 60, 70, 80 years of independence from God is DEATH!

Romans 6:23, **“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

Do you understand therefore that we have become a race of rebels?

No doubt the cavalry officers under Colonel John Chivington who killed innocent women and children at the Sand Creek Massacre⁴ thought they were the good guys and on the right side. Yet history views them as thugs, cowards, and murders!

And we have become thugs, cowards, and murders on account of Adam and Eve!

You say, “I don't feel like a rebel!”

That's because you were born alienated from God. You were raised as one alienated from God. For you and me rebellion, treachery, and hostility toward God is natural — YET THE END STILL IS DEATH!

But herein is the amazing message of the Bible. God was unwilling to let us go. And so He Himself became a man — named Jesus. He placed Himself under the obligations and requirements of the covenant. And instead of rebelling, He fulfilled our covenantal obligations and then died in our place. And then as proof of His identity, He rose again from the dead.⁵ Paul, speaking of Christ said, “[He] declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4).

Without the resurrection, Christ would be no different than any other man. The resurrection is the final proof of everything He taught and claimed!

Thus, if Christ did not rise from the dead there was no resurrection. If we claim to be a Christian and yet reject this fundamental teaching then, we are indeed dead in our sins; all who have died before are in hell; and we are fools for wasting a beautiful morning sitting here in this gym examining this passage.

And so, by logical necessity Paul demonstrates that you can't claim to be a follower of Christ and reject the resurrection. In fact, we see this in Romans.

Romans 10:9, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

According to this passage, if you reject the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ, you cannot be saved!

And yet there might be some here who are thinking thus: “But I'm not a follower of Christ; I don't care about salvation! I've heard about the resurrection and have remained skeptical. You've proved the resurrection according to your system of doctrine. Prove it historically!”

⁴ The Sand Creek Massacre occurred November 29, 1864 about one mile from Dawson's Bend. Colonel John Chivington was a Methodist preacher who felt it was his mission to destroy the Indians. In this case he attacked ignoring the white flag of surrender.

⁵ Compare Matthew 12:38-39 and the sign of Jonah!

The Historical Proof

That is exactly what Paul does earlier in this chapter.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

I hope you understand the difference between a scientific proof and an historical proof. Scientific proof is based on repetition and observation. Historical proof is based upon external, internal, and cultural analysis of information.

For example, using the Scientific Method you cannot prove that you ate breakfast this morning — or any morning for that matter — because you can't repeat that history! To prove you ate breakfast, you have to use an entirely different system — which is known as the historical method.

Paul is appealing to the Historical method here. He says that the resurrection of Christ was witnessed by over 500 people — most of whom were alive at the writing of this epistle — he is giving the Corinthians the fuel to prove the validity of his claim. In other words, if you doubt the resurrection of Christ just start asking people if they saw the resurrected Christ and it won't take long until you run into hundreds who saw Him!

The point is this: One cannot make a claim like this in a letter that was going to be copied and circulated among thousands, and expect people to believe you unless what you are saying is true!

Our Foundation

Professor Ward Churchill of Colorado University (CU) has compared those who died in the 9/11 attack with Karl Adolph Eichmann, who headed the Gestapo department of Jewish affairs. Professor Churchill is currently under investigation for research misconduct. According to the Chancellor of CU, “Research misconduct is one of the most serious allegations against a faculty member.”⁶

Family of God, that not only is true today. It was true in Paul's day as well. For Paul to claim that something was true, and then use that truth-claim as the foundation for his teaching is to commit philosophical suicide if his premise is not true. That is why Paul here is going to such great lengths to prove the resurrection. He references eye-witnesses by name. He welcomes inquiry because he claims over 500 others witnessed it. All of this is evidence upon which one can prove the resurrection of Christ historically!

Now 1 Corinthians was copied and disseminated throughout the Roman Empire. Accordingly there would have been many opportunities to discredit Paul's statements here. And yet, never was one ever given. Instead, 1 Corinthians was accepted very early as part of the word of God!

Indeed! Based on the Historical Method, Paul proved the case here! This is why, a lawyer by the name of

⁶ Rocky Mountain News, *CU: Owens' 'encouraged' by Chancellor's decision*, Friday, March 25, 2005, page 27a

Edward Clarke wrote this:

“As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. For me, the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the high court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect; the gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.”⁷

The historian Thomas Arnold of Oxford, speaking about the evidence for the death and resurrection of Christ, wrote this:

“Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece as carefully as every judge summing tip on an important case. I have myself done it many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself... I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is better proved by fuller evidence than the great sign that God has given as that Christ died and rose again from the dead.”⁸ 9

And so, while the message of Easter is a message of folly for so many today the truth is, those who reject the message have become the fool on account of the Historical Method which leads to this conclusion: Christ Rose From The Dead!

Of this we can be sure. Accordingly, the Message of Easter is indeed a message of hope.

Message of Hope

1 Corinthians 15:20-22. “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

I may not know your background or the specifics of the trials in which you find yourself today. I may not know your fears and concerns. But this I know: we are a nation of fakers. We have learned to hide our thoughts, fears, and struggles beneath smiles and trite sayings. In fact, and I don't want to shock you, but this morning in this auditorium you are seated next to idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, murderers, thieves, and sinners. Indeed stripped of the show, in our most essential form we are poor, miserable, wretched individuals at enmity with God.

Now I know all of this, NOT because I am breaking anyone's confidence, BUT because our text says it.

- Verse 21a: “For since by a man came death...”
- Verse 22a: “For as in Adam all die...”

Truly as sons and daughters of Adam and Eve we were born in sin. We are hostile to God. We are enslaved to Satan. We have as our ultimate end, the terrifying expectation of judgment upon our death.

⁷ Quoted by Dr. John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, page 402

⁸ Op Cit., pages 402-403

9. Quoted in MacArthur's *1 Corinthians*, pp. 402-403.

Oh but listen to the most glorious message your ears will ever hear is this:

- Verse 21b: "...by a man also came the resurrection of the dead."
- Verse 22b: "...so also in Christ all shall be made alive."

Do you understand? This is the message of Easter!

It is NOT simply that Christ rose from the dead. RATHER, it is that He rose as the first fruits! Listen to the text.

- Verse. 20: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep."
- Verse 22b: "...in Christ all shall be made alive."

Do you understand the implication behind this?

The "first fruits" of a harvest were the first of much more to come. Thus, Paul wrote toward the end of this chapter.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

1 Corinthians 15:56-57, "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is the Message of Easter! Through His resurrection, Christ has conquered our greatest enemy: death!

And yet He did so with the intention of being the first among many.

Yet today we have lost sight of this. Not because of skepticism over the resurrection — although that may be true for some. But primarily on account of the difficult age in which we live. Indeed, the resurrection of Christ has been buried beneath the cares and concerns of this life.

In light of the recent tsunami, terrorist attacks, and the many other things that make life difficult and uncertain, we ask God these questions:

- Why the hardship?
- Why the tragedy?
- Why the difficulty?
- If You are love, then why do so many bad things happen?

You must see that in and through all of these questions is the assumption that God doesn't care — He couldn't care!

The hardship and misery of this life — as we have seen — is the result of Adam and Eve kicking God out of their lives and going it alone — don't ever forget that! Indeed, God did not create us or this world for such tragedy. It wasn't in the garden. And it won't be part of this world when He returns. We have no one to blame for the suffering of this world but ourselves.

But again — herein is the glorious news. God is a God of love! And Easter is God's first step in reclaiming this world. Indeed “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a). This world brings with it many tribulations, trials, and heartaches — death surrounds us all! But don't miss it, “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23b).

Such is the glorious message of Easter!

Again don't miss it! When Christ rose from the dead, He paved the way for others to do the same!

John 11:25-26, “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

That is the question this morning, “Do you believe this?”

Will you trust Christ to raise you from the dead?

Will you entrust your soul to the Lord?

Will you follow Him no matter where He leads — whether it be a banqueting hall or the valley of the shadow of death?

You see! There really is only two options. Option one is that you go it alone — with Adam and Eve — and live for yourself. You will live outside the authority of God. And you will spend the fleeting years of your life as an island unto yourself. But, when you die, you will suffer an eternity in hell on account of your rebellion against God.

Or option two: you can bow your knee this day before the resurrected Christ who died so that we wouldn't have to. You can turn from your sin of independence. You can confess your need for Jesus. You can ask God to forgive you. You can vow allegiance to the Lamb! Indeed! To embrace Christ's resurrection is to embrace your own!

This morning as I close, I want to exhort each and everyone of you here to bow before Christ right now, and in silent prayer and confess your need for Him. Ask Christ for forgiveness. Commit yourself unto His kingdom service.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 27, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.