

(This is the Sunday morning worship service of Trinity Presbyterian Church of Texarkana, Texas. We recorded it early because I live in rural Louisiana, where my Internet bandwidth is not as reliable as in town.)

Sermon: “Why no one ever Asked”

What Year Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?

AD 30.

In attempting to avoid “cultural imperialism,” some modern people have switched from BC (Before Christ) and AD (*Anno Domini*, in the year of the Lord) to BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era).

However, not everyone follows this dating method, so it is certainly not common.

For example: Muslims follow a **strictly lunar** calendar.

Islam was established in 622 CE, well after the birth of Muhammad, in the year of the Hijra when Muhammad set up a theocracy.

If we imposed the so-called Common Era on Muslims, this year, 2020, would be Hijra 1398, instead of the Muslim date, Hijra 1441.

Also, because Islam follows a strictly lunar calendar, their important holy days change from year to year, and this year Ramadan will begin on April 24th, rather than, say, sometime in October.

The Jewish method of counting time was a combination of solar and lunar systems, with an extra month thrown in from time to time. That’s why Passover always falls in the spring, generally between March and April, corresponding to the Hebrew month, Nisan.

Why do I believe that Jesus rose from the dead in the year 30 of the Christian Era?

Going by the Bible in light of the first century Jewish historian, Josephus, we know that Jesus cleansed the Temple the first time in the spring of 27 CE (Josephus, Flavius. 1970 *Antiquities of the Jews. The complete works of Flavius Josephus*. Translated by William Whiston. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, p, 334).

Inasmuch as Herod the Great began his massive remodeling of the Temple in the year in 19 BCE (Before the Christian Era), that makes the date clear as we read John 2:18-21:

‘Then the Jews demanded of him, “What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” 19 ‘Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” 20 ‘The Jews replied, “It has taken **forty-six years** to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body.’

Going by that, we know that Jesus rose from the dead in 30 CE. So, following the Jewish calendar with its sunset to sunset system, we discover that Jesus rose from the dead sometime between sunset, Saturday, April 8th and sunrise Sunday, April 9th, 30 CE.

We know when Jesus rose, but when did he die?

He died three days before.

But how do we figure those days.

Friday afternoon would constitute one day, Friday night until Saturday night would constitute a second day, and sundown Saturday would begin the third day. But does that tell us conclusively when our Lord died?

No, it could have been on “Good Wednesday” or “Good Thursday”, but not likely on Nisan 16, our traditional Good Friday.

There is no New Testament book of Leviticus, so we are left with so many unanswered questions about everything from how the first Christians did baptism to the words they said during the Lord’s Supper.

And we don’t know the exact date of the birth of Jesus, nor the exact date of his death, we only know the date of his resurrection: The Lord’s Day, the very first Lord’s Day in the year 30 of the Christian Era, sometime between sunset, Saturday, April 8th and sunrise Sunday, April 9th, 30 CE.

Any honest look at the New Testament data confirms that there so many things that are not revealed.

There are different methods of baptism recorded there. For example, Jesus never told us to baptize using his actual name; he told us explicitly:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

Those are not the titles of the one God; they are the distinct Persons of the one God.

That is why we discover people being baptized in the name of Christ, other times in Christ Jesus, or the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27).

Those are descriptions of what was done; the only explicit command is that of Jesus himself in Matthew 28:19.

But my point is not that people were always baptized using Jesus' explicit command, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”; it is that **ceremonial precision is foreign to the spirit of the New Testament**.

There is no New Testament book of Leviticus, and we do not have to change into linen underwear when we worship God (Leviticus 16:4).

As we lift the cup in Holy Communion, should we say, “This cup is the new testament in my blood,” as Paul and Luke have it? (1 Corinthians 11:25; Luke 22:20) Or, should we follow Matthew and Mark and say, “This is my blood of the new testament”? (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24).

If we get the formulae wrong, will we turn the grape juice into mouse blood?

What mode was used?

When we come to descriptions of New Testament baptism, we do not find a uniform picture so clearly presented that all objective readers will agree.

The mode of baptism on the Day of Pentecost was by pouring (Acts 1:5; 2:33).

We are cleansed from our sin by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:2), symbolized by being sprinkled with water in Ezekiel 36:25: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.”

And immersion paints a beautiful picture of our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).

We certainly find believers' baptism in the New Testament. But why is it when the Bible mentions that the person being baptized had a family, it tells us the person's whole family was baptized at the same time? (Acts 16:15, 31, 33; 1 Corinthians 1:16)

The important thing is always **God's act**, not **man's**. It is what God does in baptism, not my superstitious conformity to a religious group's view of ceremonial purity.

It isn't **how** I am baptized but **that** I am baptized that is important. And always, it is a matter of the intention of the heart.

So, we may say in the plan of God, we don't know the exact date of the birth of Jesus, nor the exact date of his death, we only know the date of his resurrection.

We are left with one holy day: The Lord's Day.

What about all these pagan names?

The name "Easter" is derived from a spring festival honoring the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre—hence eggs and rabbits—she is also called Ishtar (*Cf.* Gregg, D. Larry. Freedman, David Noel, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, eds. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, p. 362).

What about other names? (*Cf.* Murray, J. A. H., et al. Editors. 1971. *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, *in. loc.*) (And Retrieved April 10, 2020, from Wikipedia
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>)

Sunday is named for the Sun.

Monday is named for the Moon.

Tuesday refers to a Teutonic deity, identified with the Roman god, Mars.

Wednesday points to the god Odin.

Thursday is Thor's Day

Friday is named after Frigg, the wife of Odin.

She corresponds to the goddess named Venus, Inanna, or Ishtar. And that is the name the Jewish heroine, Hadassah, took when she became a harem girl for the Persian king (Esther 2:7).

Saturday is name for the god Saturn.

I began to study Greek in 1965 and Hebrew in 1969, but I am an English speaker, and I only read those languages, not speak them.

What is my point?

I will stand firm against paganism and idolatry, but I will not quibble over words.

I do not pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus as *Yehoshua* (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) or *Yeshua* (יֵשָׁעַ), or Ἰησοῦς in Greek or *Iesus* in Latin. I am an English speaker, and we pronounce the “I” as a “J” at the beginning of words like these.

Continuing on . . .

Matthew 28:2-6 states: ‘There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”

One notices the angel only told the women not to be afraid. The Roman guards, he left terrified, as well they should have been. All those at war with the Lord face only terror.

Furthermore, Matthew 28:11-15 reveals: ‘While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, “You are to say,

‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ 14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.’

What does that mean?

It means that the political leaders of Israel knew these soldiers’ story was a lie. They could never explain how or why Jesus rose from the dead, but they knew he had.

It’s why they never asked the disciples to tell them where they had hidden Jesus’ body. They only demanded they keep their mouths. Every time these eyewitnesses of the Lord Jesus’ resurrection preached in the Temple it was pure torture for these leaders.

I am not speaking about the Jewish people. We fail to remember that the first century church was a Jewish institution, and it was only after the conversion of Cornelius that gentiles began to flock to the Messianic message and into the Messianic assemblies (Acts 11-12; 15).

Untold thousands of Jewish people, and even priests, embraced the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

Consider what happened when they tortured these eyewitnesses in Acts 5:29–42.

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: “**We must obey God rather than men!** 30 **The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.** 31 **God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.** 32 **We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.**” 33 When they heard this, **they were furious and wanted to put them to death.** 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel 40 His speech persuaded them. **They called the apostles in and had them FLOGGED** (This was not like my being spanked as a child; flogging ripped off the skin). **Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.** 41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, **REJOICING because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.** 42 **Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they NEVER STOPPED teaching and proclaiming the good news that JESUS IS THE CHRIST.**

I have given you the compelling historical evidence: Until the inventing of the printing press in the fifteenth century no fact in history had more documentation.

But you and I were not there with over 500 eyewitnesses, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15:6.

How can we know?

This is **why I absolutely know Jesus rose from the dead.**

In the year 1964, I experience both the worst and best days of my life.

I had fallen in love with a young woman (she was not God's choice for me). She went with me to the Junior-Senior Prom of Myrtle Beach High School, but she had no interest in a romantic relationship with me.

The next night, Saturday, April 18th, 1964, I got drunk and attempted to drown myself in the Atlantic Ocean. Had it not been for the actions of Buz Martin and Barbara Sloan, I would have succeeded.

The people at the house party I had crashed debated what to do with me: Dump me off at the police station or take me to the hospital. They took me to the hospital, and someone called our family doctor, Bill Ragsdale.

He gathered some of us up, drove around, and then took my friends and me to my parents' home.

It was a shock. They never knew that I drank, much less that I had regularly gotten drunk over the past three years.

After he got me to go asleep, he asked my parents to bring me to his office early Sunday morning, before Sunday school and church. He invited us to come to his home Bible study on Thursday nights, and Mama and I did.

Then summer rolled around, and I went to work seven days a week at Fort Caroline. I had a lot of time to read while I waited for tourists to show up at the village church to hear my presentation.

One of the books I read was David Wilkerson's 1963 biography, *The Cross and the Switchblade*. I had never heard of things like that, and the book opened me up to the idea that there really is a God who listens to us when we pray.

Up until then, I wasn't sure what I believed. Sometimes I considered myself an atheist, sometimes an agnostic, and sometimes I said I was a Christian.

Then on September 4th, 1964, I met three other young men on the third floor of the Sunday school building of the First Presbyterian Church of Myrtle Beach. I was the only member, but churches never locked their doors back then.

That night I prayed the same prayer Mama had taught me: "Come into my heart, Lord Jesus." I had prayed it at least a thousand times before. But for the very first time, I came to believe that God was listening. And then something amazing happened.

There was no emotion, no crying or laughing. It's simply that I knew that I knew that I knew that the Lord Jesus had, indeed, come into my heart. The same power that had raised him from the dead, the power of the Holy Spirit, had raised me to new life, and I had been born again (John 3:3-8; Romans 8:11; Ephesians 1:13-14, 19-20; 2:5-6; Colossians 3:1).

I now KNEW that God had raised the Lord Jesus from the dead.

It is not unlike the story of the Presbyterian minister who was shaving on a Sunday morning when he heard the Rockefellers' preacher say on the radio that it would make no difference to his faith if someone found the bones of Jesus in Palestine.

The Apostle Paul states that the reality of the resurrection of Jesus body makes all the difference in the world. Without that we are hopeless, and life has no meaning. An early death is the best people can hope for in such a time as now—without the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:13-19).

That minister stopped shaving and wrote the song with which we will close.

Closing Hymn: He Lives

I serve a risen Savior
He's in the world today.
I know that He is living,
Whatever men may say.

I see His hand of mercy;
I hear His voice of cheer;
And just the time I need Him
He's always near.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.

In all the world around me
I see His loving care,
And though my heart grows weary,
I never will despair;
I know that He is leading,
Through all the stormy blast;
The day of His appearing
Will come at last.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian,
Lift up your voice and sing
Eternal hallelujahs
To Jesus Christ the King!
The Hope of all who seek Him,
The Help of all who find,
None other is so loving,
So good and kind.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.