

The most important and comforting story of the resurrection

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Easter

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Bible Text: Luke 24:1-35
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Congregation, the text for this morning's hour sermon is from Luke 24:1-8 but let me only read verse 5 and 6.

5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,

So far.

The most important and comforting story of the resurrection. The theme for this morning: the most important and comforting story of the resurrection. Three thoughts: the story, the importance and the comfort. The most important and comforting story of the resurrection: the story, the importance and the comfort.

Congregation, young friends, today is Resurrection Sunday. That's what I would call it. Or Passover Sunday, it sounds good to me as well. Or Paschal Sunday, the Jewish Paschal Sunday, right. I don't like the word Easter. I don't want to be legalistic but I don't like the word Easter. Why not? Is the word Easter in the Bible? No. What does Easter mean? Easter is from Eostre, that's actually a Germanic goddess, a Germanic goddess associated with spring. So they had the Germans in Europe, they had a special goddess called Eostre and they celebrated her and they sacrificed unto her when springtime came, and they revered in those days chicken, and they revered hares. They were holy animals. So you understand that's different.

So why did this all happen? Well, in the Christian church they made a decision when they were evangelizing in a new country that they did not say, "That's all nonsense what you are doing here in all your religion. Get away from that and we will introduce something completely new." No, they did not do that. They thought it was better to just reformat, to reform those old feasts and they said, "Okay, so you have a feast at the beginning of the springtime which chicken and hares and stuff, let us remake that, let us change that into something Christian so you still can come to your worship places but we Christianize it." So they did not have to fight people celebrating the feasts, they did not say, "Don't do

that," they did not have to start up other feasts. So they thought it was the best to rebaptize them, to Christianize them. But the disadvantage, of course, is that things get blurred, that people mix Gentile things and biblical things together. It becomes really messy and confusing. So today is Resurrection Sunday. Today Passover Sunday. Today Paschal Sunday. And if you say Easter, it's okay with me as long as you know that's of Gentile background.

Passover Sunday. It is something we need to remember of the previous years before the Passover Sunday, the Resurrection Sunday, it is the Passover of the Jews. Remember the Passover where the lamb was butchered and eaten, and the herbs and unleavened bread, and then children asking, "Dad, what is this all about?" And the father explaining the exodus from Egypt, and the blood on the doorposts, and they ate with haste. So he had an opportunity to talk about those things, that is the same feast, kind of, because the Lord Jesus Christ, he is that Passover lamb. The Lord Jesus Christ, he is that sacrifice.

So before we go to the story, let me just ask you a question. You're enjoying the warmer weather, you're enjoying the springtime, you're enjoying that the whole creation comes to life again and we enjoy to see the green grass and the sunshine, and you enjoy that, don't you? Of course. Has there been moments that you had more joy in the resurrection of Christ? Has that become more important? More comforting? Sweeter? Those green pastures in the scriptures, those quiet waters, that Son of righteousness, that new birth in the heart, that regeneration, that seed falling into well-prepared soil, have those things become more important than springtime joy? Let us pray that we may understand it today and that at home and in church but through the word we may receive something of that comfort and see the importance of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

So that was kind of a preface so now the story. Let's go over the story, the story written by Luke. You can also merge all the stories of all the different gospels and have a different order. It's kind of a little difficult to see what's first and what's next, but you can also say today let us just focus on Luke and not pay too much attention to what Mark and Matthew and John say. That's we'll do today.

"Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning." So on Friday, day 1, the Lord Jesus was crucified and he died, and that evening he was buried by Joseph of Arimathea probably in his own new grave not too far away in which nobody had been laid before, with a huge stone rolling in front of it, and they balmed his body already the first time, and they buried him on that Friday, and quite a few of the women witnessed that. They saw Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea busy with the body of Jesus, wrapping it and sprinkling of different spices in between. But then it became later and the Sabbath started in the evening, so they wanted to be home. Yes, they wanted to be home. The Sabbath was so holy to them, they wanted to be home. They would not be outside of the city, they wanted to celebrate that Sabbath day because the Lord said, "In six days thou shalt labor and take the day of rest." So they respected that creation order and even although the Lord Jesus was in the grave, they didn't want to be there. They respected God's law, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

So on that Sabbath day, that seventh day, we would say, they just stayed home and they must have felt sad and they must have been talking the whole day and being busy with those things and what to do, and what's next, and they don't understand it, and the tears and, oh, how difficult. "I don't understand," they said. "This can't be true." It was like a dream and that Sunday must have been quite a day, that Saturday. But then on Sunday, the first day of the week, very early in the morning, so dark yet, those women are leaving Jerusalem, leaving the house. You see them in the dark yet, the group of women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and a few more, I don't know, 5, 6, 7, 10, some others as well. They came through the streets of Jerusalem and they left through the gate and entered into the area, and came around the corner and they saw that the stone was rolled away, "they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared," because the balming ritual was not something you did in an hour, but you just balmed the person on one day and sometimes the other day and the third day again until the body was completely deteriorated until only bones were left and the bones were put in a box, an ossuary.

So they wanted to participate in that process of balming the body of the Lord Jesus because he was not a deceiver, he was not hard on them. They could not forget about him. They could not turn the page and say, "We made a mistake." It was dark, it was incomprehensible, but they could not let go. There was that love in the heart and conviction in the heart, and if they would have given them a piece of paper with on there, "Jesus is not the Messiah," and asked them to sign it, to agree with that, "Jesus is not the Messiah," I'm sure they could not have signed it. There are questions, there's confusion, but to just let go and say it's over, he is not the Messiah apparently, they couldn't do that. So they prepared spices and with all the questions they still were connected to the Savior who had spoken the words of eternal life to them, "To whom else shall we go?"

So they came around the corner and they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. That's good. That's so special. They are so joyful. They are so happy. Really? They should have been. They should have been anticipating that. They should have left their home with the feeling kind of, "It's the third day. He told us the third day he would rise." So they would have crossed that court and said, "Yes, that's what we had hoped for. That's what we had anticipated. That's we had believed would happen. He's risen." No. No, and they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. The angels had done that. The Lord Jesus had risen. The guards had fled already. Shocking. It had not dawned on them what the Lord had prophesied. They should have known right away and they would have said, "Oh, of course. Yes, of course." But, no, they had not paid much attention to the details. They had heard the Lord Jesus say it, that he would be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and rise, they had heard it but they had not processed it. They kind of had given it a place somewhere in their head but it was not real to them.

So it is possible for God's people to hear something and not hear it. That's not only possible for unconverted ones and unbelievers, that they hear something and not hear it, even God's people, they hear it and don't hear it. Sometimes that takes time and

sometimes it takes years and sometimes it takes more than that. So they are not the first ones, they're not the last ones being slow in hearing and dull in understanding.

"And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus." "Good. So good. So special. He is not here. That's so great. Of course, now we realize it. He's risen." They should have anticipated and they left before they should have and they should have seen it when the stone had been rolled away and now they come into the grave and it is empty, and they would have said to each other, "See? That's what he told us." Right?

"And they found not the body of the Lord Jesus." It was hard on them. "And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout," much perplexed, they were entirely at a loss it says, perplexed. "I just don't get it. It's so strange, so impossible, so confusing." Much perplexed and at a loss, seeing, dear children of God, love poured out in their hearts, they could not let go, they're God's people, after all, and the faith in their hearts was maintained by the Lord. They persevered, in a sense. That's why they did not stay home. But although they persevered, they're much perplexed and did not understand it and were in deep unbelief, the one thing after the other did not make sense to them, and, "behold, two men stood by them in shining garments." Angels. And they bowed their heads and they thought, "What is this?"

And those angels spoke to them, those men in shining garments, "And as they were afraid," afraid, trembling. Women, you don't have to tremble for this. It's the best you can see and hear. "And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they," those angels, "said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?" This is the wrong place. You are seeking, that's good. You're seeking the living one, that's good. He is alive but not here. So those angels caused them to fear and they humbled themselves and they bowed deeply and they were shy and must have felt guilty and fearful.

"He is not here." What sweet words. "He is not here, he is not dead but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." Remember? So those angels, they point to what the Lord Jesus had said before. Those angels asked attention for the word of God. They don't have the old message, they say, "Don't you remember what he has said to you before? Saying, The Son of man," the Messiah, "must be delivered, that it is going to happen for sure he said, there is no other way he said, that he must be delivered, that that was the only way of salvation, the only way of victory, the only way of payment. He must. He must, he said he must be delivered."

"And they remembered his words." They remembered his words, "And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest." So they remembered. Now they do. They should have remembered before, way before, but finally they remember that the Lord Jesus had spoken those things. And they still don't see him. They don't see him. They still don't have revelation of him but that's fine. They believe in him. They remember him. They remember what he has said. There is calm in their hearts.

There is faith in their hearts. Although they don't see him, they believe it. It comes back. It makes sense.

And so in the life of God's people, it's not always that they have it all and that they have a revelation of Christ to the highest, but sometimes that word of God, they remember it and there is firmity in that, and there's truth in that. It's solid. It's the foundation and to rest in what he has said is also faith. So you see that God's children can be quite forgetful, forgetful of what the Lord had spoken in the past, that he had spoken, "All things are possible to me." Forgetting about what he had said in his invitation, without money, without price. Forgotten. There are so many things God's children have heard and forgotten.

"And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest." More than the 11. There were many more in Jerusalem waiting for the consolation and those women become the first preachers. The first preachers not from the pulpit, not chosen as office-bearers, not leaders in the formal way, but very influential women whose words had a deep impact. Like today still, God-fearing women can be wise and led by the Spirit, enlightening others. Female teachers, your wife, your mother, don't underestimate their influence. They can be used by the Lord.

So they come to the disciples and they tell them all those things, "And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." Same story. Same story. And they have the witness of those women on top of it, and they believed them not. It's unbelief after unbelief from the one to the other. Like later on in the chapter we hear it of those two men of Emmaus, the Lord Jesus addressing them with, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" The story.

Let's go to the second thought, the importance of the resurrection. Have you heard about the two states of Christ? Have you heard of the state of his humiliation and the state of his exaltation? You may remember that from Catechism classes vaguely. You probably remember this, that you are in the confession class, the steps of his humiliation and then the steps of his exaltation. What is that about? Well, let me ask you something: do you know something Christ profoundly and perfectly loved? I mean, not that he was completely willing but mention something the Lord Jesus really enjoyed? Not to do for someone else but for himself, something the Lord Jesus really enjoyed for himself. What about hanging on the cross? He loved to do that for his people? He wanted to do that? He was not rebellious against that but did he enjoy it? Of course not. Oh, that curse of his Father, that burning anger of God, enjoying that, to have those hellish agonies on the cross and in the garden? Did he enjoy that? Absolutely not. And what about his life on earth? That he was tired and anxious. And what about his birth? Did the Lord Jesus love it, to be born and to be born like anyone else and to be laid in the manger and flee to Egypt? No. So far since his conception up to the cross, there was nothing the Lord Jesus profoundly enjoyed for himself but only a few things like the Father said to him, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." Those glimmers of joy but most of it from his whole life was suffering, especially at the end of his life. There was nothing so far the

Lord Jesus completely and fully and perfectly enjoyed. There was always that frown of God behind it, always that disappointment of God, always the consequences of sin.

He was all those years in a state of humiliation. He felt the distance. He was servant. He was a man of no reputation, equal to his brethren in all things and he was always suffering and always something of the wrath of God, God frowning on him. All those years frowning. It was not a pleasant life for the Lord Jesus. It never had been. All those steps of humiliation, that humble birth and the suffering and the crucifixion and the death and the burial. "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." Do you see that "smite the shepherd." He was smitten. "He that spared not his own Son." His whole life he did not spare him. It's a state of humiliation and the Lord Jesus could not just live a pleasant life. "Christ has redeemed for us the curse of the law, has redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us." He was made a curse all those years, all those steps of humiliation because deeper and deeper in total he descended into hell. That's the sum of it, descended into hell, those hellish agonies. But especially on the cross, his Father hiding his face, the Father not smiling on him at all.

Then on the day of the resurrection, the Father smiled on him. The Father showed his face to his Son. The Father let him know it was sufficient, that it was all good, and the Father received him in his favor again. That's the first step of his exaltation. The Father acknowledged him and said, "I agree with all that thou hast done, and I am satisfied with it. It's all good. I justify thee. I forgive thee all the sins thou hast never done." So that is Easter, rather the Passover. That is the Paschal suffering and that is the Lord Jesus was acknowledged in his meritorial work.

You know, let me just mention a few texts from the Bible that are in a different context but yet give us a feeling on what happened on the day of the resurrection. Isaiah 54:8 is about Israel and about what they have experienced in the past, something changed. That's a different context but yet you see something similar of what the Lord Jesus experienced. "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee." So elaborating on that verse, the Lord said on the cross and up to the cross, "Hiding thy face but now everlasting kindness." So God the Father expressed everlasting kindness to his Son. "Rise up, Son, out of death."

Or think of the parable of the prodigal son, completely different context. I'm not going to compare the Lord Jesus to the prodigal son, right, but yet in how the father dealt with that son I see something of it. "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." So the father showed his love to his son and so on the first day of the week, on that Resurrection Sunday, God the Father embraced his Son and fell on his neck and kissed him. That was exaltation.

"Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my

son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry." Different context and yet something similar, "this my son was dead, and is alive again." There is joy in heaven, joy of the Father, joy of the angels because he is an adequate Savior.

So the Lord Jesus rose. That's so important because this means that the Lord Jesus' work was acknowledged by the Father and that the Lord Jesus received the receipt of his work and his payment, and it doesn't only show us but it also confirms that the payment the Lord Jesus made is sufficient, and without that payment and without the Father smiling on his Son, there's no smile for the church. If the Lord Jesus would have remained in the grave, there would have been no life, no exaltation, no forgiveness. There is more that is important, we cannot touch it all. If you'd like to know more, you can see that also in the Heidelberg Catechism on Lord's Day 17. You may want to read that this afternoon with the young people about the comfort and the importance of the resurrection. There's more but let's first sing.

The comfort of the resurrection. Where do I start? Let me begin with a question about the cross. What do we see on Golgotha? On Calvary? What do you see? Three crosses, right? And another factor, on one cross to the left and one to the right, and the Lord Jesus in the middle. Three crosses, three men. But don't you see more people hanging there? You say, "What?" I repeat the question: do you see more people hanging on the cross? No. I do. I see more people there, in fact, I myself hang there. I mean it. I am crucified. I'm crucified with Christ. So then Christ was crucified, the Apostle Paul said. He was not crucified just by himself. He was crucified with all his people in his heart, and crucified for them and with them. He was crucified with his people, together. So all God's people hang on the cross. All them that have to be saved yet and all that were saved at a certain time. All God's people are hanging on the cross and all God's people are punished on the cross, and all God's people suffer everything on the cross, and for all God's people it is true. It's finished. And all God's people arise out of the grave.

You say, "I've never heard that before." Well, that's in so many places in the Bible, that God's children are on the cross, that God's children are in the grave, God's children are raised up, God's children are in heaven already. Listen, Galatians 2, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." So Paul says, "I'm crucified with Christ. I'm so connected to him. I'm inseparable. Where Christ is, I am. I'm with Christ. I'm in Christ. I'm implanted in him. I'm one with him. I'm united with him so I'm crucified with Christ. When Christ was crucified, I was crucified."

And then the Lord Jesus rose and the Father smiled on him. God the Father smiled on his church. 2 Corinthians 13, "For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you." That's deep. Or think of Colossians 3, "If ye then be risen, if ye then be risen, with Christ." So when Christ rose out of the grave and he left that grave,

I see all of God's people come out of the grave. They all arose with him because he did it for them and they in him.

So then God the Father opened that grave and let him go, then God the Father opens the grave for all his church and he lets them go so that is called the justification in the resurrection. Romans 4, "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered," he was delivered, "for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." He was raised again for our justification. That's the comfort. God the Father put his stamp of approval on it. There was vindication. There was victory.

So the preaching of the cross is not futile, the preaching of the cross is infinitely valuable because Christ did not lose but he conquered. What a comfort but also what a responsibility. "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Therefore we are buried," we are buried, "with him by baptism into his death that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of his Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life for we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection." A little too difficult for young people? I can see that but remember this, then, the Lord Jesus died, it means the church died. The Lord Jesus paid, means the church paid. The Lord Jesus could rise, the church rises unto new life. What a comfort.

Now you say, "All good and well, but what does that mean for me?" Well, I thought of Lord's Day 31 about the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel. So let me read that and then simplify it. "When according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits." Let me make that more personal and simple. I officially declare this morning hour and I publicly testify in church, and you listen to that in your house, I declare and publicly testify to all and every believer that if you receive the gospel by true faith, I declare that all your sins are really forgiven you for the sake of Christ's merits. I publicly testify that. I just tell you with authority of the scriptures, I tell you if you take refuge into Jesus, having nothing of yourself, only relying on him, seeking your life only in him, if you really do that, then I simply state that all your sins are really forgiven you for the sake of Christ's merits.

He rose from the dead. He paid the price and now don't be like those women and those men in that unbelief. He told you. It's the Bible. In the Bible it speaks like that, it states like that, that whosoever seeks salvation in that Savior will be saved and is saved. The opposite is also true. I declare and publicly testify to all them remaining in their unbelief, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God as long as you are unconverted. So I'm not saying I hope you see that way, I hope you experience it that way, no, it is that way. It is that way.

The disciples were confused and yet the Lord Jesus rose and would meet with them several times before he would ascend unto his Father. What a kindness of Christ. What a story. What an importance. What a comfort. Amen.