

Easter

By Robert W. Reed

Edited transcript of sermon preached on
Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009, at
Victory Baptist Church, Coden, Alabama

For twenty-six and a half years of ministry I have always preached on the resurrection of Jesus Christ at this time of year, and many times we have also observed the Lord's Supper, so that has never changed. Also over the last twenty-six years we have stood against the pagan customs that have crept into the church over the years; for instance, Easter trees and bunny rabbits and eggs — and how in the world ham ever became associated with the resurrection of Christ, I do not know. But we have always taken a stand against those things, and yet there have been a few times that I have changed some thoughts and views on the word Easter.

Now, what would be a good definition of the word Easter? Well, I believe it's the Christian Passover. Most of my preacher friends in my circles are going to say, "No, you're absolutely wrong," but I believe that Easter is an English word that describes the commemoration of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I believe it was purposely put in our Bible for that reason. But, again, in our circles in fundamentalism, most would say no.

As we come to the book of Acts, we find this word Easter used in the King James Bible once. Acts 12:1-4 says:

- (1) Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church.
- (2) And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.
- (3) And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)
- (4) And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

There are basically three views that could be taken considering the word Easter. For a number of years — and especially in the time in which we live — there have been many critics of the Authorized Version. Many of the critics today say that the word Easter in Acts chapter 12, verse 4, is a mistranslation; in other words, they're saying that Easter should not be in this verse but the word Passover should be there.

View number two — and this will include a lot in our circles, even in many Baptist circles — is that the word Easter in the King James Bible is a correct translation, that it should be there, but that it refers to a pagan festival that Herod was associated with. I've followed this line of teaching for a number of years, and I've got a lot of good information on that view; it's just that I believe that it's wrong.

Then the third view — and this is the view that I'm going to present to you as being the correct view — the third view is that the King James Bible is a good translation and Easter should be in Acts chapter 12, verse 4, and it refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So this is going to be our three-point outline that we're going to consider, and whether you agree or not, I want you to at least listen to me, and when we bring this to a conclusion, consider the verses and the quotes that I'm going to give you.

But where is the balance between these two extremes? One extreme is saying that the word Easter is a mistranslation, it should not be there, and the other extreme is saying, "Well, the word is okay; it should be there, but it's referring to a pagan festival or a pagan holiday." To me, those are two extremes, and there's got to be somewhere that we can come to the Scripture and see a balance.

Now, let me give you an example — and I'm going to elaborate on this in just a few moments. Don't explain something away because you don't understand it, and not only that, don't call good evil as in Isaiah chapter 5 and in verse 20. There are many today — and I did it at one time years ago — who will say that Daniel 9, verse 27, is referring to Antichrist when the verse is actually talking about Jesus Christ. So we need to be careful in correcting the Bible and calling something evil that may be good. If you were placed on a deserted island and you had only the Bible and you had never read any book, you would never come to the conclusion that the word Easter in Acts chapter 12 is a pagan holiday. You had to read that somewhere in a book. I did the same thing for several years.

First of all, let's begin with the mistranslation view, that is, the critics say the word Easter should not be in the Authorized Version. This is one of the major issues that people have with the Bible that you have in your lap. This is one of the very first things that you will get an attack on if you say you believe the King James Bible is the Word of God. There are a number of areas they're going to go to, but one of the first areas of attack is that they're going to say the word Easter should not be in Acts 12:4.

Now, here's why they're going to say that: The word Easter here is from the Greek word *pascha*, and this word *pascha* is used 29 times in the Greek New Testament, and 28 of those times from Matthew through 1 Corinthians it is translated Passover, and only one time in the

King James Bible did the translators translate it Easter. So they say the word Easter should be Passover and Easter should not be in the Bible. Now, I do not believe it's right to correct the Bible, and I'm not in the business of doubting, changing, or correcting the Word of God. I am neither in the business of putting doubt in other people's minds about the Word of God. I believe in speaking where the Scripture speaks and being silent where the Scripture is silent.

Let me give you a few thoughts. The King James Bible translated in 1611 that uses the word Easter one time is not alone in using the word Easter in an English Bible, and it is not the first English Bible that ever translated this Greek word as Easter. William Tyndale was the first to use the word Easter in the translation of an English Bible. Now, think about this. In 1525, nearly a hundred years before the King James Bible was ever translated, William Tyndale was the first person to take the English word Easter and place it in the Word of God. In his 1525 translation, William Tyndale has the word Easter fourteen times. He has the words Easter lamb eleven times and Easter fest once and then the Paschall lamb three times. What am I saying? Nearly a hundred years before the King James Bible came into existence, William Tyndale used the word Easter over and over in his English translation, and since Tyndale, the term Easter was commonly identified as the celebration of Jesus Christ, that is, the fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover. That fulfillment took place in Jesus Christ. William Tyndale used both the word Passover and the word Easter in his translation, and in 1 Corinthians 5:7, he said, "For Christ our Easter lamb is offered up for us." Now, you ought to think about that. If the word Easter in the King James Bible is a pagan word or refers to some pagan goddess, why is it that William Tyndale in his translation calls Jesus Christ the Easter lamb eleven times and uses both Passover and the word Easter?

The 1537 Matthew's Bible and the 1539 Great Bible use the word Passover 14 times and the word Easter 15 times. In the 1568 Bishop's Bible, Easter appears in both John 11:55 and Acts 12:4. I have all these Bibles, by the way. The Geneva Bible in 1557 uses the word Easter in Acts 12, verse 4, but the 1560 version changes the word Easter to Passover, and Martin Luther's German translation uses the word *oster*, the German equivalent to the English word Easter. Now, what are we saying? The word Easter was used for the first time in an English Bible in 1525, and the words Easter lamb are also used in that Bible. In other words, William Tyndale used this word Easter in reference to Christ and His resurrection being our Passover.

You see, I am leery of anyone who will try to correct the Bible, and I try to stay as far away from them as I can because I'm afraid of lightning strikes. So I'm fearful of people who will correct the Bible or say a word shouldn't be there or should be. I'm fearful of that. You've never heard me do that. Some of you have been listening to me preach for 19 years, and

you've never heard me say that a word should not be there or another word should be there, and you've never heard me take the Greek or the Hebrew and try to correct the Bible in any way. That's one thing I can never be accused of. I've been accused of a lot of things over the years, but I'd never be accused of putting doubts in people's minds that the King James Bible is not the Word of God.

Now, as we come to Revelation 22, I'm going to read two verses, and as I said a moment ago, in the early English versions, Easter has been frequently used as the translation of *pascha*, and it was not a creation of the King James translators. It was around nearly a hundred years before that. Now, notice as we come to Revelation 22. It says in verses 18 and 19, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: ¹⁹And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book." Notice that those who add to the Book, God is going to add some plagues, and those who take away from the Book, God is going to take away their part out of the Book of Life. That's why I don't correct the Bible. I don't add to it; I don't take away from it; I don't put doubts in people's mind as to words and what God has said. If I don't understand something, I keep studying it; I leave it alone and I'll tell you I don't understand it.

Now, in the Authorized Version, the King James translators use the word Passover in other texts. Why did they use the word Easter in Acts chapter 12? I believe that it is used as a post-resurrection word or post-resurrection content. Unlike their critics, the King James translators demonstrated their understanding of words. I challenge you to study these 54, 55, 56 men that translated this Bible that took about seven years, and I challenge you to study their education, their beliefs, their closeness with God, their understanding of many languages, and even their standing against Catholicism. In the dedication to the King James Bible and many of the Bibles, they spoke against the Pope and popish people. So they were not influenced by Catholicism.

You see, many run to one extreme of this word because they think that Catholics invented Easter, and they did not. Now, have they influenced and brought in pagan practices? Yes. But look at the subject of communion. Do we observe communion? Yes, we do. But has communion been distorted over the years? Yes. You've got transubstantiation and consubstantiation — all these doctrines — but does that stop us from observing the Lord's Supper? No. And the same is true with celebrating or acknowledging the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter how corrupt it has become over the years; we still believe that

in the springtime, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He rose from the dead in the first month of Israel's religious calendar. On the 14th day of that month, He died on the cross, and on the 17th day of that month, He was raised from the dead.

Now, many will say, "Yeah, but pagans were worshiping the spring goddess years before Jesus Christ ever was born." Maybe that's true, but let me tell you something. Fifteen hundred years before Jesus Christ was ever born, the nation of Israel was celebrating Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Pentecost in the spring. Fifteen hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ, God instituted feasts for the nation of Israel, and every one of them pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ — His death, His burial, His resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and there are still three of those feast days that are pointing to the second coming of Christ — Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles.

In the entire book of Acts, the resurrection is the cardinal message, and the resurrection became the heartbeat of the primitive church. It became the heartbeat of the disciples, the apostles. They preached on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is what the book of Acts is all about — the beginning of the church and preaching that Jesus Christ died for sins, He was buried, and that He rose again the third day. I believe that the King James Bible is a good translation and that the word Easter is placed in Acts 12:4 because the translators knew something about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and led by the Holy Ghost of God, they used this English word to illustrate that.

I can say a lot more about the translation, but we're not going to accept the fact that the word Easter is a mistranslation. We believe it exactly the way it is written. So Easter should be in Acts 12:4. We're going to leave it alone. We're not smarter than God; we're not smarter than the translators, so we're going to leave the word alone. We're going to let God be God. We're going to realize that we're not God, and we're going to leave the Bible alone. We're going to accept it as it is.

The second point is that many say, even in our circles — good people, now. I'm not saying that they're wicked and evil people, but they say, "Well, this is a correct translation and the word Easter should be there, but it refers to a pagan festival." Let's talk about that for a few moments, and as I begin talking about that, keep in mind that Tyndale not only used the word Easter many times, but he also uses the words Easter lamb. Now, how are you going to pull something pagan out of that? How are you going to get something pagan out of that when a translation nearly a hundred years before the King James Bible says Easter lamb? And, by the way, 1 Corinthians 5 is referring to Christ being our Passover, and Tyndale said this is our Easter lamb. Now, who in the world is going to be foolish enough to say that's pagan?

I'm not going to go that far. I fear God enough to start stepping into those arenas. I went far enough when I quoted other men for a number of years. I'm not going any further with that. Several English translations have the words Easter lamb.

So what about the word Easter in Acts 12:4 being the correct translation but the word Easter is referring to a pagan festival celebration that occurred around the same time of Passover and it was celebrated, they say, by Herod? Well, first of all, there is no scriptural or historical evidence to back that up. There is no evidence from archeology. There are no records. It is all based upon speculation. Who was the first person to ever come up with this idea to begin with? I'll give you some thoughts on that in a moment, but let's take three areas under the teaching that Easter is a correct translation but Easter was a pagan holiday. Let's consider three things under this teaching:

Herod

As we come back to this passage, I want you to notice what it says in verses 1 to 3: "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church. ²And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. ³And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)" And then in verse 4 when Herod had apprehended Peter, he decided to wait until after Easter before he would put him to death. Now, think with me. First of all, these passages do not say that Easter is a pagan holiday. Secondly, these verses do not say that Herod worshiped some spring goddess. They don't say that. This Herod here is Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great who was king when Christ was born, and he was the nephew of the Herod who killed John the Baptist, and Herod probably was not a believer, a true believer, nor was he a pagan. As a matter of fact, you can't find any evidence of anybody in Jerusalem that worshiped Ishtar at that present time in the first century. It's just not there. Historians actually say that Herod was nonreligious and akin to being a political secularist. This Scripture doesn't say that he was waiting for a pagan holiday to come about before he killed Peter.

Now, think about this. Why would Herod even want to wait until after the Days of Unleavened Bread, Passover included in that? Why would he even want to wait until after Easter, as the word is placed in here? In our text in verse 5, we see that the church is praying for Peter, and the angel comes and releases Peter. It's not the same text, but in Mark chapter 14, verses 1 and 2, they were fearful of even putting Christ to death at a certain time because of the uprising of the Jews. Well, why would Herod even consider waiting until after the Days of Unleavened Bread or after Passover or after Easter, as the word is used here? Political expediency. This is a holy week. Passover began on the 14th and the holy week went through the 21st with the Unleavened Bread. It's a holy week for the nation of Israel, and if Herod

killed Peter during the time of their holy days, there would probably be an uprising, and Herod knew that it would be political suicide to bring about trouble in Jerusalem, because there were Jews in Jerusalem from every nation that came there to observe Passover and Unleavened Bread — multitudes of Jews in the city of Jerusalem — and Herod knew that it would be wise to wait until after Passover, wait until after Unleavened Bread, because if he had an uprising in his providence, he would be in trouble and incur wrath upon himself from the Roman government. We see similar situations in the Scripture.

So Herod is not going to kill Peter during this holy week. And not only that, not only are there Jews observing Passover and Unleavened Bread, this is ten years after the cross, and there are thousands of Christians now that are believers — 3,000 saved in Acts 2 and 5,000 saved in another passage. Thousands of Christians now are believers who are acknowledging that this time of year is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It would be political suicide for Herod to kill Peter during this holy week, I'm going to call it for the sake of understanding. But I want you to notice that in verses 21 and 22, Herod sat arrayed in apparel, sat on the throne and made an oration unto them, and it says that "the people gave a shout saying, *It is the voice of a god, and not of a man,*" and immediately the angel of the Lord smote him and he was eaten of worms. So just a brief statement about Herod.

Passover and Unleavened Bread

Now, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover are two feasts; one was on the 14th of the first month of the religious calendar and the other one begins on the 15th and goes through the 21st. But many times in the Scriptures these two feasts are interchangeable; in other words, they're observed together and even mentioned as one festival — for instance, in Luke 22, verses 1 and 7; in the book of Exodus, chapter 23, verses 14 through 17; and there are other passages like in Ezekiel 45 and verse 21 where we find the Passover is identified with and interrelated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Now, notice what it says in verse 3: "And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)" In other words, included in the Passover, you've got the Days of Unleavened Bread. So in this passage — and, again, I'm going to call it the holy week — we're talking about seven or eight days that are a very special time for the Jews, and now Christians have been saved and they're recognizing Christ as being their Passover and that He was raised on the third day.

So Herod chose not to bring Peter out publicly and kill him during the time of this holy week, which was very wise. And let me tell you this too. It would have been very foolish for Herod the man to have been waiting for a pagan festival of a pagan god in Jerusalem and not reverence the Passover. In Jerusalem, now, where there are Jews, it would have been very

foolish for him to be concerned and waiting for some pagan holiday to come about. That, again, would have been political suicide as far as his administration was concerned because he knew how the Jews felt even against Jesus Christ.

So Acts 12:4 doesn't say that Herod was waiting to worship a spring goddess, and that's the bottom line. It says he was waiting for the Days — plural — of Unleavened Bread to pass, and he was waiting until after Easter.

Easter

Now, let's take the word Easter just for a moment and consider it. I've got *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop. I've had it for over 30 years. I've read all this material, and I even fell for some of this stuff at one time. But I'm saying to you that just because some man wrote something in a book somewhere along the way doesn't change what is in Scripture.

Now, listen to me carefully. The word Easter in English means resurrection. Write it down. It means resurrection. It is of Anglo-Saxon origin, and it means resurrection. And even the German word that's used in Luther's translation, *oster*, means resurrection.

I'm going to give you a quote or two here. Those who study origins of words, etymologists, say that the English word Easter is derived from the German word for dawn, which sounds very similar to Easter, and it has its origin in the word East. The word East is in Easter, and the sun rises in the East. Malachi 4 says that Jesus Christ is the Sun of righteousness who arises with healing in His wings. So East is the direction of the sun. The word East is in the word Easter, and those who study origins of words say this is where it comes from. I'm quoting again: Many languages have only one word for both the Jewish Passover and the celebration of the resurrection of Christ. In the original Greek language, the word *pascha* is for both Passover and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Native Greeks know that the word *pascha* means Easter. They only have one word in many languages for both Passover and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter is used in the English-speaking countries, and Germany has a similar name, but everyone else calls it some form of *pascha* even in the Spanish language.

I'm not saying there never was a spring goddess. I'm not saying that there never was worship of pagans in the spring. I'm not saying that. I am saying that the word Easter is not a pagan word. It's the English word with its roots in the Germanic language which basically means resurrection. So Easter is not a Christianized pagan festival of some spring goddess or god of fertility. You've got the German word *oster*; then you've got Ishtar or Ashtar, and we go on and on with these words and try to connect them together, and this thing just goes round and round in circles, whether it's the West, the East, the Near East, Babylonians, the

Chaldeans, the Phoenicians or whatever. Sure, they have their gods, but Easter does not mean Ishtar or Ashtar.

Where do these sources come from? Where is all this connection? Basically from two places. One source comes from an English Catholic historian named Bede and his work *The Reckoning of Time* who lived in the early eighth century, and he states that Easter is derived from an Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring named Easter or Ostara. Archeologists and historians have never found evidence that supports this. There are no records; there are no artifacts that I know of, and there are no ruins. I've had Alexander Hislop's book for over 30 years, and he said this about Easter: "What is Easter?" and he gives you an answer. He said, "It is not a Christian name. It bears its Chaldean origins on its very forehead. Easter is nothing less than Ashtar." This is quoted from page 130. And then he also said this about the King James Bible: "Everyone knows that the name Easter used in our translation of Acts 12:4 refers not to any Christian festival but the Jewish Passover." He said, "This is one of the few places in our version where the translators show an undue bias." He's critical of the Bible that you have in your lap. That right there tells you to leave him alone. He's critical of your Bible, to begin with, and says the translators have undue bias, so he begins to run this theory — and that's basically what it is. It's a theory; it's speculation; it's myth-mixing, and I'm simply saying to you that, with his clumsy scholarship, he has no proof. The word Easter in the English language means resurrection, and the word Easter should be in Acts chapter 12 because it has reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

First Corinthians 5:7 says Christ is our Passover — and as in Tyndale's Bible, our Easter lamb — that was sacrificed for us. Hallelujah! He is our Lamb, and He died for our sins, and He was raised again the third day. So Easter is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, by the way, this celebration of Christ was observed by many long before the English word Easter was ever adopted into the English Bible. We didn't get the word Easter in an English Bible until 1525, but there were saints of God who recognized the resurrection of Jesus Christ for 1500 years before that.

So what is Easter? We still put aside all the paganism. You don't see an Easter tree here this morning with eggs hanging from it. We won't have an egg hunt this afternoon. We don't have chocolate bunnies. We're not even going to have ham for lunch. We're going to have turkey. But here's the point. We put aside all of these things that have crept into the church of Jesus Christ, we ignore them, but we take this time of year in the spring to honor the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every flower that has bloomed already in this month of April is a testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So although it's not commanded, we recognize the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We honor that, but yet we don't include pagan practices and we don't deny the word that God has given us in our English Bible that identifies the resurrection of Christ. Easter is a Christian fulfillment of the Jewish Passover which occurred on the same day of the Jewish calendar. It is a post-resurrection word purposely placed in some English Bibles where Christ became the Lamb of God. And another author has said that Easter is not only a synonym for Passover but also a descriptive word revealing the New Testament fulfillment of Passover in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection — and I say Amen to that!

Let's go back to 200 years before Constantine. Have we not heard that Constantine invented Easter? Let's go back 200 years before Constantine reigned. Let's go back before the Nicene Council and the Nicene Creed of 325 AD. Let's go back a few hundred years before that and consider what we find in church history. Easter is not a Catholic holiday. It was observed before the Catholic Church was even conceived. The English word Easter was not even used until centuries later.

I've got the names of 17 early church writers written down here, including Polycarp and Irenaeus, who lived in the second, third, and fourth centuries, and as early as 120 AD this was talked about. I've got quotes by these men that wrote about the Pascha or Easter celebration. Now, think about this. They recognized the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and they never debated as to whether they would observe or recognize this day. What they did debate and argue over in Asia Minor and Europe was when they would recognize the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because the Jewish Christians held on mostly to the 14th of Nisan, the first religious month of the Jewish calendar, in other words, the same day that Passover was on. Jewish Christians held onto that day. And then many of the Gentile churches started adopting, "Well, no, we believe it's the Sunday after the 14th." That's where the debate was, not whether or not we'll recognize the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the spring. It was just what day are we going to recognize it, and that's what the Council in Nicaea was all about. It wasn't to invent Easter, but it was debating the day that churches would observe this day. Even Irenaeus speaks of Polycarp visiting Rome to discuss Pascha. Polycarp said this was observed by the Apostle John, and Polycarp was supposed to be a personal disciple of the Apostle John. It was talked about in the second century, third century, fourth century — long before Constantine.

John chapter 1, verse 29, says, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Jesus Christ became the Passover Lamb, and He was sacrificed on the 14th day of the first month of the religious calendar. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the 10th day — His Triumphal Entry — to be put on

display before Israel and the world, and on the 14th day He became the Passover Lamb, and during this holy week as in Acts 12, during the Days of Unleavened Bread, Christ was raised from the dead. You've got Passover and Unleavened Bread and the Feast of First Fruits, which is the resurrection, all in one week and then days later Pentecost. And, again, I've got quotes from the 1828 Webster's Dictionary, the Oxford Dictionary, and on and on talking about what Easter really is.

Now, I realize the other side of this issue. I've got those quotes from Hislop and Vine's Expository Dictionary and so forth. I know what they all say. I probably have far more material than any of you have because I've been collecting this material for 37 years. But I believe that it's wrong to say that the word Easter in Acts 12:4 is a mistranslation, and I believe the critics are wrong for slandering your Bible. I'm not going to take the word Easter in Acts chapter 12, verse 4, and say that it's pagan when the Bible doesn't say it's pagan, and I'm not going to say that Herod was waiting on a pagan holiday when the Bible doesn't say he was waiting on a pagan holiday. I'm going to stick with the Book. I don't care what Bede said or what Hislop said or anybody else said. I'm going to stay with the Word of God.

I believe Easter is a good word and the translators were led by the Holy Ghost of God to use that word in Acts 12 as a post-resurrection word ten years after the cross to tell us about Jesus Christ being resurrected. I believe it's a beautiful word, and it should be there. I quit using the word Easter for a number of years. I'd just say Resurrection Sunday. But this morning I'm saying Easter is a Bible word, and it's about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter is a good Bible word. It's in our Bible. And, again, we exclude all pagan customs and practices. We've done that over the years. But I'm saying to you that I come here this morning recognizing the resurrection of Jesus Christ because there's no salvation without it.

Now, let's close in 1 Corinthians 15. First of all, it says in verses 1 through 4, "[Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ²By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.](#)" You ask, "What is the gospel message? What is the good news?" Well, Christ died for our sins; He was buried — this is all according to Scripture — and He rose again the third day according to Scripture. Now, you'll notice with me that if you were to read verses 5 through 8, these verses tell us of the witnesses and those who saw His resurrection. In other words, we read in the Bible that there was the empty tomb; there were over 500 eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Christ. He spent 40 days on this earth after His resurrection. I'm simply saying

that millions have believed the gospel and sealed their testimony in blood. Why? Because they believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 15:12-19 says:

(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?

(13) But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

(14) And if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain.

(15) Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

(16) For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

(17) And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins.

(18) Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

(19) If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

There are three things I want to give you in closing:

1. If there be no resurrection, then Christ is not risen. It says in verses 12 and 13 that "if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen." If there be no resurrection at all, then Christ is not risen. Keep in mind that Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, verses 23 through the end of that chapter, was centered around one thing, and that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The people asked for a sign, and Jesus said, "I'm going to give you one sign, the sign of the prophet Jonas. He was three days and three nights in the whale's belly," and Jesus said, "I will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." In John chapter 2, verses 11 through the end of that chapter, the resurrection is the key doctrine of Christianity. It would have done no good for Christ to die for sins if there were no resurrection. We would never know whether our sins had been paid for. So, number one, if there is no resurrection, then Christ is not risen.

2. If there is no resurrection, we remain in our sins. It doesn't matter how good we are or how good we think we are; if there is no resurrection, then we remain in our sins. And I want you to keep in mind that it's the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation, Romans 1:16. It is the fact that Christ was raised for our justification, the latter part of Romans 4. Now, look at verses 14 through 17: ¹⁴"And if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain. ¹⁵Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. ¹⁶For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: ¹⁷And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins."

Think about that. Everything is vain as far as we're concerned if Christ did not rise. We're wasting our time here this morning. My preaching is vain, our faith is vain; assembling together here this morning is vain if Christ did not rise from the dead. So our Christian faith is based upon the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter how good we live. The Bible says we're born in sin. The Bible says we come from our mother's womb that way. The Bible says we've broken all God's commandments — “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We can change our lives, try to reform our lives, but if there is no resurrection to save us from our sins, then we have no salvation.

3. If there is no resurrection, then we have no hope. Look in verses 18 and 19. Verse 18 says, “Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished”; in other words, if there's no resurrection, our loved ones that we've planted in the ground, that we've carried to the cemetery will not be raised from the dead; there would be no salvation for them. He said they perish. Verse 19, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” In other words, there would be no joy. If there is no resurrection, those who are in the grave have no hope; they perish, and if there is no resurrection, the only thing we've got is what we have here in this life, because when we die, it's over.

And then in verse 32 Paul said, “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.” If there's no resurrection, Paul is saying why have I debated these doctrines and why have I fought with beasts? He's talking about men at Ephesus. Why have I done all of this if there is no resurrection? And this is why the Lord is called the first fruits in verse 22. He's also called the first fruits in verses 20 and 21 and so forth. And why is he called the first fruits? Because He's the guarantee of our resurrection. In the Old Testament, Israel was required to bring a sheaf of the first fruits from every harvest, and the priests would take it and wave it and present it unto the Lord. In other words, the first fruits was the very first thing that they got out of their fields, and they would wave that before the Lord, present it to the Lord. Christ is the first fruits. He was presented before the Lord God. He is the guarantee that you and I will be resurrected one day.

But let me close with one verse in this passage. The whole chapter is dealing with the resurrection, and it's a wonderful chapter. I have a friend who got saved many, many years ago on Easter Sunday, and he said it's so easy to remember when he came to know the Lord as his Savior. I thought that was great. He got saved on the week that Christ would have been raised from the dead. And, by the way, Christ is called the firstborn of the dead in Colossians 1:13 through 18. He gives assurance to all men, Acts 17, verse 30 and verse 32.

The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 1, verses 3, 4, and 5, that we have a living hope. Again, our hope is based upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As we read through chapter 15 in 1 Corinthians, it tells us that we bear the image of the earthy and one day we'll bear the image of the heavenly. As you come to verses 47, 48, and you come down to verse 50, it says that flesh and blood shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. We need to be saved. We need to be raised again. We need to be resurrected, and verses 51 through the end of the chapter tell us that we're going to be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. It talks about this corruption must put on incorruption, this mortal must put on immortality.

All of these things are based upon Christ's resurrection for you and me, and this is why Paul could say in verse 57, "But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." He's saying that we have the victory through Christ, and he's saying in this context that Christ took the sting out of death, and this is why he can say in verse 58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." He could say, "Listen. Be steadfast, be unmovable, keep living for God." How could he say that? Because of Christ's resurrection. See, he's saying that is the guarantee. He said keep abounding in the Lord because your labor, as well as your faith, is not in vain. So as we've assembled together here this morning, it is not in vain. God will honor this. God will honor our labors. He'll honor our faith. Why? Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, let me close in verse 22 — a short verse but look at the truth that's revealed to us in this verse: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." In Adam all die. That's not just physical death. It's talking about eternal separation from God as in Revelation 20. And he says, "even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Are you in Christ this morning? Have you been born again, born of the Spirit? The Bible speaks of Christ being in us, but it also speaks a number of times of us as Christians being in Christ. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature in Christ. And how do we get in Christ? Through repentance and faith, through believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 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."

The doctrine of the resurrection is mentioned over a hundred times in the New Testament — a very important doctrine. As a matter of fact, Christianity is based upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are many religions and many religious leaders and so-called messiahs, but they're all in the grave. In Christianity we have a risen Savior seated at the right hand of the Father.

So as we read through the book of Acts and as we begin looking at the epistles, we find that the resurrection of Christ is the heartbeat of the church; it is the center, it is the foundational message of Christianity because you cannot have Christianity without the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's so important that we understand this and we believe this — it's very important. I hope that you will not call good evil. I hope you will not doubt this Book that you have in your lap this morning. I hope you'll believe every word of it. I hope that you'll not add anything to it and incorporate anything else in the text, and I hope that you'll not take anything away from it. I hope that you'll not doubt it, and I hope that you'll never cast doubt in somebody else's mind, because good people over the years and even people that love God have read books and been convinced of something, and then they have doubts and put doubts in other people's mind.

Don't let anybody mess with your Bible. It's God's holy Word. It's given by inspiration, word for word. You say, "I don't understand it." That's not the issue. Revelation 1, verses 1, 2, and 3 say not he that understandeth shall be blessed, but he that readeth and they that hear the words shall be blessed.

Would you stand with me this morning as we assemble together here, and let's kneel together and pray and thank God for His beautiful and wonderful plan from before the foundation of the world that He would send His Savior, that He would not only be our Passover Lamb, but He is the first fruits, and this time of year in the spring, He chose to die, to be buried, and to be raised again.

Father, we thank You for this day. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the Holy Spirit. We thank You this morning, Lord, for Jesus Christ. We thank You for what He accomplished at Calvary's cross, and, Lord, we thank You for the fact that You raised Him from the dead and He's now seated at the right hand of the Father. Lord, we praise You this morning for this beautiful plan from eternity past that You've brought to be a present reality in our lives, and, Lord, we look one day for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, for it's in His name we pray, Amen.

* * * *