

Why We Celebrate Selected Scriptures

Introduction

Christ is Risen!

Today we celebrate what the angel told the Mary Magdalene and the other Mary at Jesus' grave - *Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead*" Matthew 28:5-7). Christ has risen from the grave. It is an event that occurred in history, but it is also present reality. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day following His crucifixion and He remains alive today. In the future, His promise is that all those that believe in Him shall also be risen to receive immortal, imperishable and eternal resurrection bodies that we might live with the Lord forever more.

It was a joy earlier this morning to meet with other believers at Fishkill Rural Cemetery at the grave of E. Myrtle Baker, a wonderful Christian lady who was a member of this church when I first came in 1991. The site is on the slope of the east slope of a hill overlooking the rest of the cemetery. It was good to have others there with me today as we watched the sunrise, sang songs about Jesus' resurrection, and considered the hope that has given to us. Last year I was there worshiping the Lord by myself due to the sudden implementations of government restrictions the previous Good Friday. If I knew then what I know now, I would not have been alone.

A year ago we were dealing with a medical threat that was being presented as excessively lethal and we yielded to caution. As time went on, those of us who understand and follow true science learned much more about the virus, its dangers, and methods of abating the disease. I am a case in point since I contracted a bad case of COVID-19 in February, but because my wife and I knew what to do and had already developed contacts to get the proper medications, I both stayed out of the hospital and shortened the severe symptoms to less than a week. For over a year politicians induced fear fanned by ignorant media based on claims that have proven to be science fiction. They continue to do so at present because it gives them a political advantage to maintain government control over society while also using it as the basis for spending trillions of dollars in political pork.

As Christians, we have a different perspective on both life and death. That is why we behave differently from the rest of society on so many issues. And lets face it, a bunch of people gathering in a cemetery at sunrise to sing songs and listen to someone speak when it is not much above freezing make us different, and most of society would consider us to be very odd. With membership in religious institutions - churches of all sorts, synagogues and mosques - dropping in the U.S.A. to below 50% in 2020, much of what we do because of our religious beliefs will be viewed by the majority as strange, and that will only get worse unless the Lord grants a true revival. But truth is determined by the decree of God and His design for the universe which He created, and not by the majority opinion of people. In addition, the majority of people often believe things that are contrary to reality due to their own ignorance and desires.

As Christians, we love truth because our God is the God of truth, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. We love the truth we can learn as we examine God's creation, which is why most branches of science were founded by those who held to a Christian understanding of the world. This love of truth still makes Biblical Christians the best scientists. We love the truth God has revealed even more because these are truths we could not learn by our own

observations, experimentation or ability to reason. We recognize the truth that we are creatures who are limited in time, space and reasoning. If the most intelligent person on earth had his IQ increased by a hundred-fold, he would still be an imbecile before God. Why? As stated by the Lord in Isaiah 55:8-9, ⁸“*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,*” declares the Lord. ⁹“*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.*”

The world would consider us to be crazy for gathering in a cemetery as we did this morning at sunrise. The world would also think something is wrong with us for meeting outside, as we are now where it is cool enough to be uncomfortable, instead of being inside the warm building next to us. Why do that? Because we believe that what we are celebrating today is worth every effort to maximize the number of people that can be present whether it is inside, outside or streaming. We know that some of you are under restrictions by your work or school about being part of large indoor gatherings. We know that some of you are just not comfortable yet in being indoors with a large group of people. We love you enough to go through all the extra work and inconvenience of holding our worship service outside for your sake because being together to celebrate the importance of this day is that important!

For those who are streaming at home, we know that some of you have legitimate reasons for not being here physically such as distance, health issues and work schedules, and we are glad the Lord has allowed us to use technology to make our services available to you. It is not the best, but at least it is something.

However, I want to challenge those of you who are streaming out of convenience. 1) You are hindering your own worship of God because corporate worship cannot be experienced remotely. You can observe, but you cannot participate in what we are doing. You are not part of the congregational choir joining voices together in worship of God. You cannot receive the ministry of the people here using their spiritual gifts to help you grow in your walk with Christ. 2) Related to this, you diminish our corporate worship because you are not adding your voice to our worship, and we are not receiving the ministry of your spiritual gifts to the congregation. 3) The worship of God requires sacrifice. If your worship of Him is conditional upon your own convenience and comfort, then you are not worshipping Him.

What can you do? It is too late to be here today, but plan on being in church or at least with other believers if at all possible in the future. Figure out what you need to do and do it. For those without a good local church or those restricted to small groups, then gather with the believers you know and participate remotely in a worship service. For today, stand (if capable) and sing the songs with us. Call others in the church to talk about the service or to encourage one another in walking with Christ. It is an oxymoron to be a Christian hermit, for Christians are part of the body of Christ, the church, and every part of the body is needed to be functioning properly, and a part that is cut off from the rest of the body will wither away.

So why do we celebrate and why is it so important?

Man's Dilemma

We celebrate in part because what Jesus has done for us has provided a means of dealing with man's great dilemma of sin. The dilemma is that people love sin, but it is very bad for you in this life, and damns you for eternity. Sin is so popular that to speak against it causes offense and can cause the speaker problems. That has resulted in a lot of preachers who want to be “seeker sensitive” refraining from talking about sin, or if they do, they redefine it to make it less troublesome or reassign responsibility so that it is someone else's fault. Calling sin a disease or an addiction makes it sound like you are victim and that you can be cured by either a doctor or psychologist. But neither they nor any other human can cure you. Claiming it was someone else's fault so that you are a victim instead of perpetrator may make you feel better, but it does not solve the problem. Blaming someone else is a very human thing to do

going all the way back to Adam and Eve. She blamed him, and he blamed God, but God cursed them both for their own sins.

By definition, sin, in both Hebrew and Greek means to “*miss the mark.*” It was used for shooting an arrow and missing the intended target. Applied to man’s spiritual and moral condition it means that people fall short of what God requires. God has given His commands to man and every human has failed to keep them. That is why the words transgression and sin are used so often interchangeably (Rom. 5:20) and Romans 3:23 is direct in saying “*all have sinned.*” The apostle John wrote that “⁸ *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us,*” ¹⁰ “*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us*” 1 John 1:8,10.

That is not much of a concern to many people because they figure that since all people sin, and they are not as bad as others, then they should be okay. They wrongly assume that God either grades on the curve or weighs your good deeds against your sin. God neither grades on the curve nor balances your good with your evil. He judges pass or fail, and any and every sin is a fail which brings about its consequences. James 2:10-11 goes further explaining, ¹⁰ “*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*” ¹¹ *For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.*” Whether it is a sin of action such as lying, stealing, cheating, blasphemy, idolatry or one of the heart such as lust, coveting, selfishness, pride or hatred, sin is transgression of God’s law which places you under its penalty. Telling a lie makes you a liar. Taking something without permission from the owner makes you a thief even if the value is small - pens from work or a store. Blasphemy is any irreverence toward God including using His name as an exclamatory remark. Adultery and fornication occur in the heart long before any action is taken.

What is the penalty for sin? Ezekiel 18:4 is direct stating, “*Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.*” Paul is also direct in Romans 6:23, *The wages of sin is death.*” Death is separation. Physical death is separation of your soul from your body. Spiritual death is separation of your soul from God. When Adam violated God’s command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was in the Garden of Eden, God was true to His warning and Adam and Eve died that day spiritually for it caused them to be guilty and they hid from God. They also started the process of dying physically. The genealogy in Genesis 5 lists 10 men who lived to be incredibly old, an average of 912 years excluding righteous Enoch who was not because God took him at 365. Yet it is a record of the effects of sin because all but Enoch died. Methuselah lived an astonishing 969 years of life, but he still died.

But worse than physical death and present separation from God is the future eternal punishment and separation from Him. Please understand that the place that the Scriptures refer to as Gehenna or the lake of fire, Hell in English, is a very real place. It exists whether you believe it or not, and claiming hell is not real is calling Jesus a liar since He talks extensively about it. He even contrasts it with heaven in Matthew 25. What is hell like? It is described as *eternal fire* and *fiery hell* (Matthew 18:8-9), *the lake of fire* (Revelation 20:15), a place where the *fire is not quenched* and *the worm does not die* (Mark 9:48), an *outer darkness* where there is *weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 25:30), a place of retribution for *those that do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus* where they will *pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presences of the Lord and from the glory of His power* (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). The anti-Christ, the beast, Satan, the demons, death and hades will all be thrown into it. And from Luke 16 we learn that if you already have a friend or relative there, they are in agony of flame and do not want you to join them in that place of torment (Luke 16:19-31).

What then can man do to overcome his sin problem and its consequences? Nothing himself. People are already *dead in trespasses and sin* according to Ephesians 2:1, and the only thing something dead can do is rot. People cannot become righteous on their own before God for two reasons. First, as stated in Isaiah 64:6, “*all our righteous deeds are as like a filthy garment*” before God who is absolutely holy.

Second, even if you could stop sinning and live in perfect righteousness from this point of time forward, you still have the problem of your past sins for which you are still guilty and must be judged.

We celebrate today in part because Jesus has provided a solution to both aspects of this dilemma of sin. Jesus is God's solution that both changes our hearts toward sin and provides forgiveness for it so that we do not have to suffer its eternal consequences.

God's Solution

How is Jesus' a solution to the dilemma of sin? Or stated a different way, how can Jesus make it possible for a sinner to be forgiven and made righteous? Or stated still a different way, how does Jesus enable God to be both holy and just as well as loving, merciful and gracious. God would be unjust if He forgave sin without the penalty for it being paid. He would be unholy if He welcomed the unrighteous into heaven. Yet He would be unloving, unmerciful and ungracious if He did not provide some means by which His fallen creatures to escape the penalty of their sins.

The answer was partially answered in the sacrificial system that began on the day that Adam & Eve sinned. After God found them hiding from Him and they confessed what they had done, God cursed them, but He also gave them a hope within that curse of a future child that would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Then *"the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them"* (Gen. 3:21). You cannot get the skin off an animal without killing it. This was the beginning of the sacrificial system. The animal's life was substituted for the life of the man and woman. This system was codified in the Law of Moses, but it began after the first sin. The problem is that an animal is not an equivalent of a human, and *"it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins"* (Heb. 10:4). There would need to be a substitute sacrifice that was sufficient, and that sacrifice would be Jesus.

Jesus is the perfect sacrifice He met all the conditions needed. First, He would have to be a man in order to be an equivalent substitute sacrifice to pay for man's sins. Jesus was fully man being born of the virgin Mary.

Second, Jesus would have to be sinless otherwise His death would be for His own sins and could not be a substitute for anyone else. Jesus was *"tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin,"* which also made Him the perfect high priest who could sympathize with us (Hebrews. 4:15). Even Jesus' enemies could not convict Him of sin (John 8:46).

Third, He had to be more than a man in order to be a substitute sacrifice for all sins of all people otherwise His death would only cover one sin for one person. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us in human flesh, so the value of His life is infinite. As Hebrews 10:12 puts it, *"but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God."*

And finally, He had to do it voluntarily if it was to be an act of love, and as I pointed out at the Good Friday service, Jesus was not a victim for He was in control of His own death. As He said in John 10:17-18, ¹⁷ *"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸ "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."*

Since Jesus became the perfect substitute sacrifice at Calvary, what is the importance of the resurrection in solving man's sin problem? First, Jesus declared He had authority to both lay down His life and to take it up and again as we just saw in John 10:18. He declared multiple times that He would rise from the dead (John 16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19; 26:32; Mark 8:31). If He did not rise from the dead, He would be a liar. But much more importantly, without the resurrection, there would be no evidence that Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient and accepted by God.

Paul explains the importance of Jesus' resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 because there were some that began to teach there was no resurrection of the dead. He states very bluntly in 1 Cor. 15:17-19, ¹⁷ *"and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of*

all men most to be pitied.” Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the Christian faith would be just another false and worthless religion which would leave people condemned in their sins and without true hope as all false religions do. But Paul continues on in verse 20, *“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”*

Jesus resurrection proves that all His claims and His promises are true. He is who He says that He is, the sinless Son of God. As God He has the authority to make promises, the proven character and ability to keep them. The hope of a Christian - the confidence assurance that Jesus will fulfill His promises - is founded in His resurrection.

The Evidence of Jesus’ Resurrection

Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is so pivotal to God’s plan of salvation for man from sin, it is attacked with great fervor by the enemies of God. The attacks are baseless and contrary to the evidence and even to basic reasoning.

Matthew 28:11-15 explains how the claim that Jesus’ body was stolen by the disciples got started. Aside from the silliness of claiming 11 scared men untrained in warfare and in hiding could overcome the armed and trained Roman guards who would properly be executed if they failed their mission, there is the simple fact that the resurrection could be easily disproved by producing Jesus’ body. That fact also disproves the ideas claiming that the women and Peter & John all went to the wrong grave or that those claiming Jesus rose from the dead were hallucinating. Simply producing Jesus’ body would easily disprove all claims of the resurrection, but that could not be done because Jesus was no longer there. He rose from the dead just as He said He would. The grave was empty!

The theories related to Jesus’ passing out instead of dying and then later escaping the tomb are contrary to fact and ludicrous in multiple ways. First, those who handled His body declared Jesus to be dead including the Roman Centurion. Second, because He was already dead, they did not break His legs, and a spear was thrust into Jesus’ side to make sure, and blood and water flowed out indicating it was already separating after death. Third, the theories require a man severely beaten, scourged, crucified, then laid in a tomb wrapped up in linens and spices including a face covering, without food or water for at least 50 hours, is able to get out of the linen wrappings, roll the stone away from the grave, overpower trained Roman guards, and then escape without being seen.

There are two main lines of evidence for Jesus’ resurrection. The first are the multiple credible witnesses that saw Jesus after His resurrection in diverse times and places, many of these were in groups of up to 500 at one time. The second is the radical effect it had on the apostles. These men who had been so scared that they were hiding became extremely bold in short order even challenging the religious leaders that had put Jesus to death. The group of ordinary men ended up upsetting the world with the gospel message (Acts. 17:6).

Hope for Present and Future

Because Jesus’ resurrection is the proof that His claims and promises are true, it is the foundation of the Christian’s hope for the present and the future. Here are a few of Jesus’ precious promises.

Hope for the Present

Matthew 11:28–30,²⁸ *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”*²⁹ *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*³⁰ *“For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

Matthew 5:6, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”*

Matthew 6:33, *“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things (food, drink, clothing) will be added to you.”*

John 12:46, *“I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.”*

Luke 5:24-25, “. . . *the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*”

John 14:21, “*He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.*”

Matthew 12:50, *whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.*”

John 15:5, “*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*”

John 15:16, “*You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*”

John 14:13, “*Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*”

Matt. 28:20, “*I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*”

Matthew 5:10–12, ¹⁰ “*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* ¹¹ “*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.* ¹² “*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

John 16:33, “*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*”

Hope for the Future

John 5:24, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*”

John 6:37, “*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.*”

John 10:27–30, ²⁷ “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;* ²⁸ *and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.* ²⁹ “*My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.* ³⁰ “*I and the Father are one.*” John 14:1–3, ¹ “*Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.* ² “*In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.* ³ “*If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.*”

Because of Jesus’ resurrection, we have a hope in the present because He gives meaning to life in the here and now while promising to enable us to fulfill those purposes. We have hope in the future because life continues into eternity and Jesus has promised that all who place their faith in Him as their Lord and Savior will spend eternity with Him. He will not lose you and no one and nothing can take you out of His hands.

Corporate Worship

This morning we gathered in a cemetery at sunrise in memory of Jesus’ Resurrection which has given us the hope of our own future resurrection. We gathered at the grave of Myrtle Baker because when Jesus returns, she will rise from her grave and then we who are alive and remain will be transformed and together we will meet the Lord in the air and so be with Him forever more. Those are the promises God has given to us because the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

We have gathered to celebrate what the world does not understand because the natural man does not understand the things of God (2 Cor. 2:14) and does not value them. In selfishness, the world wants things to be convenient and comfortable, and in fear, it wants to minimize risk to itself. So why go out when it is cold and risk disease or death? Tragically, the world usually does not know what should be

feared. Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, *“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”* The world views us gathering together as foolishness and too risky.

We see it the opposite way. What God has done for us in Jesus Christ is worth every effort and every risk to honor with worship. He is worthy of it and we are to do it according to His will. That includes not just individual worship which can be done anywhere at anytime, but also corporate worship of gathering together at a set place and time to lift our voices together in praise and song; to join together in prayer and petition to Him about the things that are on our hearts; to consider together the truths of His word; and to minister to one another as God has gifted each of us so that the whole body may mature and be strong. Any extra effort it takes to accomplish these things is just that much more rich in true worship for sacrifice is part of it.

We will use reasonable cautions to abate unnecessary risks, but we will not yield to science fiction, nor to government threats, nor to social pressures. We will do everything that we can possibly do to find ways to meet corporately to worship our great God. We celebrate because Jesus conquered sin and death, and because of that he offers those who believe in Him forgiveness, righteousness and eternal life. His perfect love casts out all fear for our lives are secure in Him in the present and the future.

Sermon Notes - March 21, 2021
Why We Celebrate - Selected Scriptures

Introduction

Christ is Risen!

Christians behave differently than the rest of society

Christians love truth

Corporate celebration & worship of God is worth every effort

Find a way to participate in worship & body life with other Christians

Man's Dilemma

People love sin, but it is bad for you in this life and damns you for eternity

Redefining sin or blaming others does not change God's judgement of it

Definition of sin:

God's judgment of sin (James 2:10-11)

The penalty for sin (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23)

Description of Hell

Man's inability to solve his sin problem

We celebrate because Jesus provides a solution to man's sin dilemma

God's Solution

How can God be both just and merciful?

Consequence of the sin of Adam & Eve

God makes the first sacrifice

The insufficiency of animal sacrifice

Jesus is the perfect sacrifice as the sinless fully man and fully God who voluntarily paid the price

The necessity of the resurrection - 1 Cor. 15:17-19

What the resurrection proves

The Evidence of Jesus' Resurrection

His body was not stolen

Jesus was physically dead

Many credible witness

The radical change in Jesus' disciples

Hope for the Present

Matthew 5:6; 5:10-12; 6:33; 11:28-30; 12:50; 28:20; Luke 5:24-25; John 14:13, 21; 15:5, 16; 16:33

Hope for the Future

John 5:24; 6:37; 10:27-30; 14:1-3

Corporate Worship

We celebrate what the world does not understand

God is worthy of every effort to worship according to His will which includes corporate worship

We celebrate because Jesus conquered sin & death and rose from the dead proving His claims & promises

KIDS KORNER – Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. Young Children – draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. Older Children – count how many references celebrate and worship. Talk with your parents about why Christians gather to celebrate Jesus' resurrection and worship Him.

THINK ABOUT IT – Questions to consider in understanding the sermon and its application. How does a Christians perspective on life and death result in living differently than society? Why do Christians love truth? Why is remote participation in worship deficient? Why are laziness or inconvenience sinful excuses for not physically joining in corporate worship? Why do people love their sin? Define sin. What are the consequences of sin both temporal and eternal? On what basis does God judge people for their sin? How do the Scriptures describe Hell (Gehenna, the lake of fire)? Why can't man solve his sin problem on his own? Who made the first animal sacrifice? What is the basis of animal sacrifice? Why is animal sacrifice insufficient to take away sin? What four factors make Jesus the perfect sacrifice for sin? Why is the resurrection of Christ necessary for the Christian faith? Could the disciples have stolen Jesus' body? Explain. Could the women have gone to the wrong tomb? Explain. Could Jesus have passed out and revived later? Explain. What are the two main lines of evidence that Jesus rose from the grave? Jesus resurrection proves His claims about Himself and that His promises are true. What are some of His promises that give you hope for the present? For the future? Why should Christians make every reasonable effort to join in corporate worship? How does sacrifice increase the worship given? Why do you celebrate Jesus' resurrection?