

Easter Sunday

*“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:
that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”
(1 Corinthians 15:3–4 ESV)*

The Third Day He Rose Again

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Luke 18:31-34

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you this morning I would love for you to open it now to Luke 18:31-34. I mentioned last week that we have timed out our Apostles’ Creed series so that we could be looking at the line in the Creed that deals with the resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. That felt especially brilliant to us. The line in question, of course, reads as follows, and I’ll start from the beginning so that you can hear the line in context:

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried; he descended into hell; **the third day He rose again from the dead...**”

That’s our focus this morning: **THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD** – will you say amen to that?

Amen!

That’s what Easter Sunday is all about. We make a big deal of this **BECAUSE IT IS A BIG DEAL**. The resurrection is not a **TACK ON** – the resurrection of Jesus Christ is **EVERYTHING**. It matters. It matters **MAXIMALLY**.

If Jesus wasn’t raised from the dead then **5 really important things that ARE TRUE would not be true**.

If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead:

1. Then the Bible isn't true

The Bible SAYS that Jesus rose from the dead – it says it over and over and over again. All the Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – they all say it and the later epistles talk about it all the time as well. The Apostle Paul says:

“We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again” (Romans 6:9 ESV)

The Apostle Peter says that we are BORN AGAIN to a LIVING hope:

“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3 ESV)

So this teaching is ALL OVER THE BIBLE – so if it didn't happen, if Jesus didn't raise from the dead ACTUALLY – then you should throw your Bibles in the garbage. If Jesus wasn't RAISED then your BIBLE is full of lies.

Secondly, if Jesus wasn't raised:

2. Then your sins are not forgiven

The Apostle Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 15:

“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:17 ESV)

The resurrection was God's stamp of approval upon Christ's work of atonement. It was like that glorious moment when you stick your debit card in the machine and you type in your PIN and you wait a few seconds and then: GLORY! The machine says to you: Payment Accepted. Please remove your card.

That's what the resurrection is!

It is God saying to Jesus – and to all the watching world: PAYMENT ACCEPTED! Please remove card now.

When Jesus comes up from the dead and comforts his disciples he is saying to them: I have paid it all. You are free now to go home to your heavenly Father.

Praise the Lord!

That's why it MATTERS that Jesus rose from the dead – because if that payment WAS NOT ACCEPTED then we are still in our sins and they will weigh us down and carry us down to hell when we die.

So it matters that Jesus rose from the dead.

Thirdly, it matters whether Jesus was raised from the dead because if he wasn't then you won't be either.

3. Then you will not rise from the dead

The Apostle Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22:

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:20–22 ESV)

So Adam made people DIE and Jesus makes people LIVE – if they have faith in him. But of course, if Jesus wasn't raised, then you're faith is futile and we are all just children of Adam who will DIE and return to the dust from whence we came. But if Jesus DID rise from the dead, and we are in then we will LIVE and return to heaven from whence HE CAME!

So YES - it matters whether or not Jesus really ROSE from the dead.

And fourthly it matters because if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Jesus is NOT REIGNING OVER ALL.

4. Then Jesus is not reigning over all

The Apostle Paul said:

Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”⁹ (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:8–10 NRSV)

So according to Paul, if Jesus didn’t DESCEND then he wouldn’t have any captives, and if he didn’t ASCEND then he wouldn’t have any CONTROL – but he does have control! He is seated on the throne and he is dispensing gifts and disposing all things so as to bring about the fullness of his kingdom.

The Apostle to the Hebrews is even more specific, he says that Jesus is SEATED NOW:

“at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2 ESV)

So he went down, down, down and he came up, up, up – ALL THE WAY UP to the right hand of the throne of God where is seated now REIGNING OVER ALL! But of course if that didn’t happen; if Jesus went down and he never came up then Jesus is not in control. He is not filling and disposing all things because his soul remains locked in shadow and in darkness.

So again – it matters that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead – thanks be to God!

Then lastly – it matters that Jesus rose from the dead because IF HE DIDN’T:

5. Then you are all alone on this earth

Before Jesus left this earth he made his disciples a promise, he said:

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:18 ESV)

He was talking of course about the Holy Spirit whom he calls “another comforter”. Meaning that the Spirit will be with us AS THE SPIRIT AND PRESENCE OF JESUS.

Jesus said that – Jesus promised that – but that was a promise he could only keep if he really did rise from the dead and ascend to the right hand of the Father. John knew that. He added a little editorial comment all the way back in John 7 after something else Jesus said about the Holy Spirit. He said:

Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:39 ESV)

John knew that Jesus would have to go down and then RISE UP and that if he didn't do that then he would never be able to send that OTHER COMFORTER that he had promised.

No resurrection – no Holy Spirit – so YES the resurrection really matters.

It matters MAXIMALLY and if that's all you remember from this morning, then that will be just fine with me – but it does occur to me that we almost NEVER talk about this little phrase in the Creed about the THIRD DAY. Which is odd because the Apostle Paul considered it a matter of first importance. He said:

For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that **he was raised on the third day** in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4 ESV)

That's a first order doctrine, Paul said. But we almost never talk about it – and so today I thought we would. I hope you still have your Bibles open to Luke 18:31-34. I think as we read this we will begin to understand why it was that the Apostle Paul – and the writers of the Apostles' Creed

– were so eager to REMIND US that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 31:

And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.³² For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon.³³ And after flogging him, they will kill him, **and on the third day he will rise.**”³⁴ But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. (Luke 18:31–34 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

So – we almost never get to this part of the story on Easter Sunday morning, so let’s do today. Why does it MATTER that Jesus was raised from the dead ON THE THIRD DAY?

Why Does It Matter That Jesus Was Raised From The Dead On The Third Day?

Paul said that it happened according to the Scriptures – he says:

“that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day **in accordance with the Scriptures**” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4 ESV)

Well – what Scriptures? Have you ever asked yourself that? If I asked you what Scriptures predicted the DEATH of Jesus I imagine you would point me to Isaiah 52 and 53 – good for you! In my catechism class that would earn you an M&M. If you went with Zechariah 12:10 that would earn you TWO M&Ms. But what about the resurrection? Where would you go for that? And what about the THIRD DAY piece? Where would you go for that?

Thankfully, scholars think about this stuff. The Pillar New Testament Commentary says here:

“The reference to *the third day* in v. 4 brings to mind Hosea 6:2 and Jonah 1:17.”¹

¹Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 748.

Alright, we'll write those down. Those are the two that are most frequently mentioned, but some scholars also point to Numbers 10:33. So let's do this, let's look at Numbers 10:33 first – then if you don't like that one, you can focus your thoughts squarely on the two that everyone agrees on. Does that sound good? Alright, let's turn in our Bibles quickly to Numbers 10:33. The Book of Numbers is the 4th book in the Bible if that helps you. The passage will also appear on the screen behind me.

In this story, the people are leaving Mount Sinai where they had been camped for quite a while. They had received the law there, they had built the Tabernacle there – quite a bit had happened there but now it is time to start moving toward the Promised Land. The Bible says:

So they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey. And the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them. (Numbers 10:33 ESV)

Now, I mentioned that not all scholars find that compelling, but some do. Matthew Emerson for example says here:

“Just as the Ark of the Covenant went before the people of Israel through the wilderness for three days to find a place for them to rest (Numbers 10:33), so Christ has gone before us through the wilderness of Hades to prepare a place for us to rest in him.”²

Now, before you discount that and say, “Well that's a bit obscure”, you should remember that Jesus very intentionally recapitulated ALL the major events in the life story of the people of Israel. Israel was tempted in the desert for 40 years, so Jesus went into the desert to be tempted for 40 days. Israel went down to Egypt and came out – so Jesus went down to Egypt and came out – do you remember that? Matthew tells us that this was WHY – ultimately - Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus down to Egypt, because the Bible says:

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” (Matthew 2:15 ESV)

² Matthew Emerson, *He Descended To The Dead* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 219.

So Jesus SCRIPTED HIS OWN LIFE to fulfil every aspect of this historical narrative. He was saying: I am Israel. What Israel collectively failed to do, I, Israel personified will do to perfection.

So I don't think it is even close to being a stretch to imagine that Jesus would script PRECISELY his death and resurrection so as to MIRROR important events in the history of Israel. He certainly would and he certainly did.

So if we are right in seeing in this story in Numbers 10 a bit of a pattern that Jesus wished to fulfil then it would seem that Jesus has chosen to rise from the dead on the THIRD DAY in order to remind us that HE IS THE ONE – ultimately – that leads us home to the Promised Land.

1. It reminds us that Jesus is the one who leads us home

That's what the Ark DID in the Old Testament and then once they are in the Promised Land the Ark mysteriously disappears – but then it shows up again at the end of the Bible – do you remember that? In Revelation 11:19 the Apostle John sees a vision of the throne room of God – he says:

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and **the ark of his covenant** was seen within his temple. (Revelation 11:19 ESV)

So somehow, in this vision, John says, the Ark has found its way HOME – to our ULTIMATE HOME! It's there waiting for us – it has gone ahead of us – just as it did in the Old Testament. So I think it very likely that Jesus IS picking up on that little bit of symbolism and applying it – intentionally – to himself.

But if you don't like that, don't worry about it, you'll love this. Of this little bit of symbolism, there can be absolutely no doubt, because Jesus teaches it EXPLICITLY.

Turn in your Bibles now to Matthew 12:38-42. Matthew of course is the FIRST book in the NEW Testament. Matthew 12:38-42 says:

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.”³⁹ But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.⁴⁰ **For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.⁴² The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Matthew 12:38–42 ESV)

Ok, so there can be no doubt here, can there be? Jesus himself clearly says that JUST AS Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, SO will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Now – for modern western readers that expression – 3 days and 3 nights always causes a bit of concern. Because of course Jesus was not in the grave for ALL of 3 days and 3 nights was he? Not by our reckoning. We would say that he was in the tomb on Friday late afternoon, all of Saturday and then just a bit of Sunday – he rose again EARLY on the first day of the week, the Bible says. But Jews don’t reckon time the way we do and they don’t refer to time the way we do. If it was part of the day, it is referred to as the day – anyway, we don’t have time to go into all of that – NT scholar Leon Morris gives us the bottom line, he says:

“However we understand it in detail, the expression indicates that after the crucifixion Jesus will be three days in the tomb.”³

Ok. So Jesus DESIGNED this aspect of his redemptive work – HE SAYS – to mirror the experience of the prophet Jonah. JUST AS Jonah was in the belly of the whale for 3 days – so too Jesus will be in the belly of the earth.

Why so? What was Jesus trying to communicate by doing it that way? Well, he tells us in Matthew 12:

³Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 326.

The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:41 ESV)

So, flip back in your Bibles to the Book of Jonah. The Book of Jonah is a TERRIBLY hard book of the Bible to find because it is so small and it is stuck between a couple of other small books. Jonah comes JUST BEFORE MICAH and JUST AFTER OBADIAH which itself comes right after Amos. Amos, Obadiah, JONAH. Look at Jonah 1:17:

And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. (Jonah 1:17 ESV)

So Jesus wanted to appropriate this story so when he died he stayed dead long enough to fill out this imagery, and as soon as he had done so – by Jewish reckonings of time – he came up. There was no use being dead any longer than he had to, to fulfil this sign, so at the three day mark UP FROM THE GRAVE HE AROSE – hallelujah! And he AROSE – like Jonah emerging from the belly of the fish.

Look at Jonah 2 – we almost never talk about this part of the Jonah story – we turn it into a children’s tale, but it is actually an illustration of the resurrection IN ADVANCE. Look at Jonah 2:1-4, this is Jonah’s prayer from the depths of the sea:

¹ Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,

² saying, “I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; **out of the belly of Sheol** I cried, and you heard my voice.

³ For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

⁴ Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ (Jonah 2:1–4 ESV)

So Jonah understood his journey in the belly of the fish as being somewhat analogous to the descent of a soul down to Sheol – down to the realm of the dead. From there he prayed and the Lord gave him faith that he would RISE AGAIN and that he would go up, up, up, even unto the house of the Lord.

And that happened!

Look at verse 10 and following:

And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

¹Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³**So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh**, according to the word of the LORD. (Jonah 2:10–3:3 ESV)

Can you imagine what a sight that must have been? The sailors have been spreading the word about the poor old Jewish prophet they’d had to toss into the sea. They’d been telling everybody about how a big fish had come along and swallowed him whole! And how here into town marches the old man himself! Covered in seaweed and reeking of bile and preaching repentance in the name of Yahweh God! Ha! No wonder the whole city repented in sackcloth and ashes! God had raided HELL ITSELF to send them a messenger of salvation!

And Jesus – STEPS INTO THAT STORY and says:

The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:41 ESV)

You were impressed by that story? You were impressed by that descent? Well I am going to go much deeper than that – so if you don’t repent when I preach to you having been raised from the DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY then the men of Nineveh will rise up and condemn you! They figured it out – and you better too because if you don’t then you will the wrath of Almighty God FORVER.

That’s the point! That’s why it matters that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day – this is Jesus saying: I AM THE PROPHET THAT EVERYONE MUST LISTEN TO!

2. It reminds us that Jesus is the prophet we must listen to

But there's one more text I want to show you.

Turn in your Bible to Hosea 6 verses 1-2. If you are in Jonah just go backwards – left – a little bit and you will hit Hosea. Hosea 6:1-2 says this:

¹ “Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

² After two days he will revive us; **on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.** (Hosea 6:1–2 ESV)

Alright, now this is a very interesting quotation. It is something that the people of Israel said **WRONGLY** – meaning it was a saying in Israel at the time when they were facing the prospect of defeat and destruction as a nation. They said basically: “Surely this will be a brief experience of chastisement. God will press us down for a few days – but then he will lift us up!” They were predicting an **EASY REMEDY** for their sin! Old Testament scholar Daniel Carroll says here:

“This sinful people presume that a favourable verdict from God will come in quick order - another sign that they appreciate neither the seriousness of their transgressions nor the uselessness of their religious activities.”⁴

You think a two-day punishment will be sufficient, God says? You think **TWO DAYS** of being hard pressed and on the **THIRD DAY** I will raise you up that you might live before me? That's what you think?

Ha! I will show you what kind of punishment is required to **PAY** for the sins you have committed. I will show you how far you have to be put down in order that I might raise you up to live before me.

That's **WHY JESUS DIED AND STAYED DEAD AND ROSE FROM THE DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY**. That was God saying: **THIS IS THE PUNISHMENT** that brings you true and everlasting peace.

Of course, the prophet Isaiah said that too:

⁴ M. Daniel Carroll R., *Hosea* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Revised Edition*, Volume 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 257.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was **the chastisement that brought us peace** (Isaiah 53:5 ESV)

So whether you take it from Hosea or Isaiah – this is PART of what Jesus intended to communicate through the manner of his death and resurrection. He was saying – you can't just feel bad for your sins. You can't just sprinkle some holy water on it. You've got to be PRESSED DOWN – but much further than you think. These sins that you have committed will drag a person down to hell. This is a bigger problem and it will require a more drastic solution than you could ever understand or imagine.

So it is a matter of FIRST IMPORTANCE that Christ was raised on the THIRD DAY in accordance with the Scriptures because that communicated – to anyone who had carefully read those Scriptures – that Jesus was the one who leads us home, that Jesus was the prophet that we must listen to and that Jesus bore the punishment that brought us peace.

3. It reminds us that Jesus bore the punishment that brought us peace

Will you say amen to that?

Amen!

Everything – EVERYTHING - Jesus did he did to fulfil the Scriptures. He is the Ark. He is the prophet. He is the payment. He is everything you need to be right with God, to be in the truth and to be on your way to the house and to the city of our God.

The Lord is risen! He is risen INDEED – in accordance with the Scriptures, thanks be to God!
Let's pray together.