

The Results of the Resurrection - 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Scripture Reading: Luke 23:50-24:12

Introduction

Have you ever heard the term, “Mortality Saliency”?

I hadn’t either until recently but mortality saliency is the awareness by individuals that their death is inevitable

When we’re young, death seems so remote, so distant - death is something that happens to other people

But as we get older we begin to experience mortality saliency because we know that death is waiting and there is no escape from it

And we don’t like it

People have worked very hard in searching for the secret that would forestall or even prevent the inevitable

The idea that death could be put off by a magical substance goes all the way back to the Greek historian Herodotus in the 5th Century B.C. and the “elixir of life” was also a part of ancient Chinese and Indian legends

And we have all heard about Ponce de Leon, the 16th Century Spanish explorer, who searched the New World for the fabled Fountain of Youth

Today, science has once again turned its attention to prolonging life and new discoveries in genomics has some researchers believing that today’s children could routinely reach ages of 100 or even 120 years

Still, there appears to be no viable cure for the “disease” of death and the best science can possibly offer is a meager putting off of the inescapable

I bring all of this up because this morning we are gathered to celebrate the fact that death has already been overcome

While we know that we all face our date with death, the sting of death has been taken away, the power of death has been overcome, and the grip of death has been broken

Someone took on death and defeated it and his name is Jesus!

Two days ago, we met to remember Jesus’ death upon the cross

No one doubted that Jesus had died on that cross some 2,000 years ago - after all, no one survived a Roman crucifixion

The Romans were very good at executing people; the soldiers in charge of crucifying condemned criminals were efficient, effective, and they didn’t make mistakes - their very lives depended on it

Once a person was nailed in place on those timbers, they weren’t taken down until they were dead

And as the friends and family of Jesus prepared his body and laid it in a borrowed tomb they had to believe that death had won and claimed another victim

For three days, Jesus’ body lay in a borrowed tomb, wrapped from head to toe in grave clothes laden with spices

And we say that the tomb in which he lay was a *borrowed* tomb because after three days Jesus vacated it so that its original owner, Joseph of Arimathea, could have it back

Death could not hold onto Jesus and on that first Easter Sunday, Jesus rose bodily and victoriously from the tomb as he defeated death!

Jesus’ resurrection was *the* message of the early church and they told of it every chance they got

In **Acts 4:33** Luke writes that “*the apostles [namely Peter and John] were giving their testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*”

And in **Acts 17:18** he reports that Paul was “*preaching Jesus and the resurrection*”

And in **1 Corinthians 15:3-8** Paul summarized the content of his preaching by saying:

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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

The early church focused on the resurrection to the degree that they did because it's Jesus' resurrection from the dead that makes the gospel the good news for all mankind

And this morning I want to take some time to remind us of why this part of the story is so important by pointing out three results of the resurrection that otherwise would not be possible

First, the resurrection assures us that God can forgive our past

I. The resurrection of Jesus says our past can be forgiven

By his own admission, Mark Twain didn't believe in the existence of heaven and hell, the immortality of the soul, nor the divinity of Jesus Christ

He was highly skeptical of the Bible's contents and, although he professed to have a belief in God, making him decidedly not an atheist, he frequently questioned God's motives

Still Twain had a sense of sin as he is quoted as saying, "Man is the only animal that blushes and the only animal that needs to"

Twain was right, we *are* all guilty of sin and we *should* blush

And we all know that we are sinners, even if we don't know the language for how to speak of it, and we all know that our sin is a violation of God's standard and our sin separates us from him

That's why many people speak of their hope that when they die they will have done more good than bad in their life and receive reward for it

Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that God has "*put eternity into man's heart*" and everyone has what has been termed a God-shaped hole in our hearts that only God can fill

That means we have an innate understanding that tells us God is there and yearns to be connected to him and yet we know that our sins alienate us from him

And even if a person claims that they don't believe in God, deep down in their heart of hearts they know that there is a standard they will be measured by and a judge that they will answer to

Then we read in the gospel accounts how Jesus came into the world with the message that our sins can actually be forgiven and it's possible for us to be reconciled to God

One of Jesus' favorite phrases during his earthly ministry was "*Your sins are forgiven*"

In Matthew 9, he said it to the paralytic whose friends lowered him down through the roof on his bed as Jesus was teaching

And in Luke 7, he said it to the sinful woman who anointed his feet with costly perfume while he was dining at the home of a Pharisee

Then Jesus linked our forgiveness with his death as he taught in **Matthew 26:28** that the communion cup was representative of his shed blood "*which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins*"

Jesus claimed that our sins can be forgiven through the application of his shed blood and he made abundantly clear in **John 14:6** that he was the only way for mankind to be reconciled to the Father

But how can we know for certain that Jesus could really do that?

How can we know that his death was in fact substitutionary and that he paid our debt on the cross so that our sins are truly forgiven?

He said that was what he was going to do but couldn't anyone make the same claim?

Couldn't you or I or anyone else make the same claim?

Of course, Jesus showed many proofs to support what he said during his earthly ministry

He even asking the paralyzed man from Matthew 9 whether it was easier to say that one's sins had been forgiven or that one is physically healed because he knew that some of the people present were skeptical of his claim

And then he went ahead and healed the man of his paralysis indicating that even he knew that it was an easy thing to say "*your sins are forgiven*"

But how can we know that those four words are true and still in force today - that God has accepted the death of his Son as full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world?

The proof is found in the resurrection of the Son

Think about it, as necessary as Jesus' death was for the forgiveness of sin, had he remained dead, had his body been left in the tomb, and if we could now point to Jesus' burial place, we would have to conclude that his sacrifice was a failure

If death defeated Jesus just like it beats everyone else, we would have to deduce that he was no more sinless than you or me and he therefore wasn't qualified to die in our place and secure our forgiveness

The resurrection of Jesus is the key to the whole matter of forgiveness as the apostle Paul made clear in **1Corinthians 15:17** where he wrote:

...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

But Jesus did defeat death!

God the Father raised him from the borrowed tomb on the third day proving that he approved of what Jesus had done for us on the cross

The resurrection that we commemorate today tells us that Jesus didn't die in vain and anyone's past can truly be forgiven if they will only put their complete trust in him and call upon him as their personal Lord and Savior

Everyone who has ever lived starts life as an enemy of God condemned by their sin nature and they compound their guilt by their sinful acts

And perhaps you are listening to this message today and you think that you are too guilty to be forgiven - that what you have done in your past is simply too much

Look with me at what Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:13-14**

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Jesus paid our debt and the Father raised him from the tomb to demonstrate that it was sufficient and there is no sin that is not paid for in full except the sin that a person determines to carry on their own

No matter how bad you know your past to be the resurrection proves your past can be forgiven

But, if you're like me, you don't just need to have your past forgiven, you also need help living in the present and that brings us to the second result of the resurrection - the empowerment of our present

II. The resurrection of Jesus says our present can be empowered

I wish I could say that I have it all together and that I never struggle with doing what I should and not doing what I shouldn't

I wish I could say that I never feel like I'm incapable of living the way I know God wants me to live

I would suspect you wish the same thing for yourself but the fact of the matter is that, even when a person is saved, they still have a sin nature that fights for dominance and satisfaction

Even the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7 about his struggle to do well and referred to himself as a "wretched man"

But God never intended for us to live this life and contend against the desires of our flesh in our own power

By nature we are incapable of doing anything that is good

As Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 64:6** even those things we think are good and noble are like pus-filled bandages or the contaminated clothing of a leper to God

God's plan is that we will get power to live rightly from him because God has the power to change human nature and to remake fallible, sinful human beings so that they conform to the image of his Son

There are those who like to say that God will never give us more than we can handle

And I'm here to tell you that is unbiblical nonsense because God often gives us more than we can handle so that we will come to the end of ourselves and turn to him to plug into his power

Paul writes about that very thing in his second letter to the Corinthians - look with me at **2Corinthians 1:8-9**

For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

You'll notice God's intention for the affliction was to cause Paul to turn to God and to rely on God's power but I want you to also notice the guarantee that the power of God is available and sufficient lies in the resurrection

Paul turned to and relied on "*God who raises the dead*"

Then in **Ephesians 1:18-20** Paul prays for the believers in Ephesus that they would have

the eyes of [their] hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places

What Paul is saying in those passages is that the same resurrection power that brought Jesus bodily back from the dead is available to those who follow Christ

That the same God who was powerful enough to raise his Son from the dead is able to raise us from our dead life of sin to a life of righteousness

I have experienced the power of transformation in my life and seen it in the lives of others

All true followers of Christ should be able to make that claim

After all, **2Corinthians 5:17** tells us

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

And it's the power of the resurrection that does that at the moment of salvation and then empowers the ongoing change brought about through sanctification

As we've been going through the letter of 1Peter on Sunday mornings, we have repeatedly seen how our lives as sojourners here can have an impact on others

But, if we are simply trying our hardest to live exemplary lives in our own power we are bound to fail and harm our testimony - we must be plugged into and relying on the power of God

And that's great news for us because no matter how weak we may be the resurrection assures us that we can be empowered to do well and perhaps, by our lives, draw even the hardest skeptics to the throne of God

The resurrection of Jesus can result in forgiveness of our past and can provide empowerment for our present but it doesn't stop there

It also assures us that our future can be secure

III. The resurrection of Jesus says our future can be secure

People tend to recoil from death because of the loss that we know it brings

We know death takes away the life we know, our possessions, our position, our potential, and our relationships and casts us into a future that we have not yet experienced

So it only seems natural to face death with at least some amount of unease or anxiety

But we know that no matter how hard we fight, eventually, death is going to come along and takes it all because, on a long enough timeline the survival rate for everyone drops to zero

That's simply a fact in this fallen, sin-stained world we live in

But, as we are reminded, as we gather on Easter Sunday, Christ-followers can face death with confidence and rejoice in the reality of the resurrection

Because Christ-followers, those who have a new life in Christ, don't lose that life when they die

Oh, for certain, when they lose their earthly life they lose all the things I just mentioned the same as other people

Even Christ-followers leave their possessions and relationships behind when they die but they don't lose their new life in Christ - as a matter of fact it becomes better and more real after they die [**Philippians 1:21**]

Remember what we saw several weeks ago in **1Peter 1:3-5**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

God promises those who follow his Son an inheritance that he is guarding and preserving in heaven for them and he promises that he is guarding and keeping them for that inheritance

But did you notice how we can be assured of that fact?

Because God "*has caused us to be born again to a living hope **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead***"

Isn't it amazing how often the apostles refer to the resurrection and use it as the basis for our assurance?

Should the Lord continue to tarry in his return, the day is going to come when each of our bodies will return to the dust from which they came

But our spirits, our true selves, will be joined together with God in heaven and, at the final resurrection of the dead, our spirit will be united with a heavenly body that will never die

And that is assured because God the Father has already raised his Son

In **1Corinthians 15:20**, Paul refers to Jesus as “*the firstfruits of those who have [died]*”

“Firstfruits” refers to the sheaf of grain that the people were to bring to the priest who would wave it before the Lord as an offering and no grain was to be harvested until the firstfruits offering had been made

So, in that way, the firstfruits was symbolic of the larger harvest to come and Paul says that the resurrection of Jesus is the promise of the larger resurrection to come - the resurrection of the saints

And again in **Romans 8:11** Paul writes:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

The resurrection of Jesus assures us that our past can be forgiven, our present can be empowered, and our future can be secure

Conclusion

As true followers of the risen Christ, we know that death is not the end

Death for the believer is simply a striking of the tent and moving on to an eternity of life and joy in the presence of God

We know that we can expect a blessed reunion with those Christ-following friends and family members who have gone on ahead of us

But here’s the catch

To know the power of the resurrection of Jesus you must know Jesus

In Philippians 3 the apostle Paul wrote about his credentials as a Jew prior to his salvation and he says [**Phil 3:8-11**]:

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Paul speaks of “knowing” twice

Once in verse 8 when he speaks of “knowing Christ Jesus” and in verse 10 when he speaks of knowing “him [Christ] and the power of his resurrection

Paul isn’t talking here about intellectual knowledge - to know *about* Jesus

Paul means we must have an intimate, personal knowledge or relationship with Jesus

In order to know the power of the resurrection of Christ that we have just been looking at one must have a relationship with Christ and be relying on him as their Savior

Statistics tell us that about 60 million people will die this year worldwide

That works out to roughly 114 people every minute of every day

That means that close to 6,000 people have found out what lies on the other side of death since this service began

I don’t know how many of them were truly ready for death by knowing Jesus and the power of his resurrection

But the good news of Easter is that no one needs to fear death

There are two options for where one will spend eternity after they die - with God in heaven or without him in hell

Those who don’t know Jesus as Lord and Savior should rightly fear death because, should they die without knowing Jesus they will face an eternity apart from God

Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and **Romans 6:23** says that the wages of sin is death

But no one needs to collect those wages or pay the price for their sins - there is nothing in God's nature that makes that necessary

Because **Romans 5:8** says that while we were yet sinners [and enemies of God] Christ died for us

Good Friday actually proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that God would rather die than spend eternity apart from you

And the rest of **Romans 6:23** tells us that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord

But to receive that gift you must call upon the Lord for salvation, admit that you are a sinner who cannot help themselves, and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead

Do that, Paul writes in **Romans 10:9**, and you will be saved and you will know the power of the resurrection of Jesus

The message of Easter is that death has been defeated - but only for those who are trusting in the risen Christ

So the question you must answer for yourself is whether death has been defeated for you

Are you depending on the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus to the point that you are risking your eternity on what the Bible says and what he did for you on the cross?

If you are, you don't need to fear death - for you, death is a conquered enemy and while your body will still die one day, you will live forever with God

You can rest easy knowing that your past has been forgiven; that God will empower your present; and your eternal future is secure with him

That's the power of the resurrection and the message of Easter

Let's pray

Luke 23:50-24:12 (page 884)

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.

On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.