

Christ is Risen!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 April 2023

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] I want to wish you all a very happy Easter weekend. It's wonderful to see all your faces. Particularly delighted this morning to see visitors among us! And old friends joining us this morning.

! Our Father in Heaven, we thank you that you have vindicated your Son and given Him all authority in Heaven and on Earth.

We rejoice in His glorious and triumphant victory over death, we rejoice in the fact that there is no square inch of this universe over which He is not King and Lord.

And we know one day every tongue will confess it so. And we thank you that His victory is our victory. And we pray that by His Spirit, by which He is present with us, you will speak to us from your Word.

We ask it in the risen and exalted name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. So, in the former Soviet Union, one of the Communist Party leaders gave a speech.

[1:40] And he summed up his speech with these words. I quote, He finished his speech to the mandatory applause one would expect in a totalitarianism.

He finished his speech. He finished his speech. The church is an oppressive institution. The church is an oppressive institution. And anyway, the church is out of date.

The future belongs to the state. And the state is in the hands of the Communist Party. He finished his speech. He finished his speech to the mandatory applause one would expect in a totalitarian regime.

After which, an old Russian Orthodox priest asked if he could say a few words. He was told he only had five minutes.

The priest responded, I only need five seconds. The old priest got up to the podium, looked at the thousands in the party hall, and shouted, Christ is risen.

[2:47] Christ is risen. Christ is risen. There was a momentary pause. Then the crowd thundered back. He is risen indeed. And in that response, the priest revealed the lie to all the tales that the party leader had been telling.

Christ is risen.

And to believe that, to believe in such a thing, has been relegated, in the mother mindset, to primitive religious fancy. No rational, scientific human will believe these such things.

The motherness will tell us. Tragically, many in the church, many in the church, many of them wearing clergy colors, also have come along to deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And in the current post-modern age that we're in, any claim to absolute truth is frowned upon. You know, it's all well and good if you believe as a coping mechanism.

[4:26] But just don't express certainty about it. And so you'll hear many say today, maybe he rose from the dead. I don't know.

Or, it's true for me. And it's okay for me to believe it, and for you not to believe it. But the truth of the resurrection is not a mere coping mechanism.

It is a fundamental fact that has historical, theological, and eschatological significance. The word eschatological just means, it has significance that has to do with your final destiny, the final destiny of your soul, the final destiny of the human race, the final destiny of the world itself.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has historical, theological, and eschatological significance. There are only two alternatives.

The Easter story, the Easter story about the death, burial, and resurrection, is either the most important fact of history, or it is the biggest hoax ever invented.

[5:38] Those are the only two alternatives. You see, Easter is not merely some quaint pastime of egg hunts and springtime.

The Easter story is a challenge. It challenges us all. The men and women who believed this story, at the outset, turned the world upside down in their proclamation of it.

Even in the face of fierce opposition, as they were challenged by the world. But they, in turn, challenged the world to listen to the truth they proclaim.

I find it incredible, I find it incredible, that even before the resurrection happened, people had started inventing stories to dispute the event.

If you look in that gospel reading, and I encourage you to follow along in your Bible, so you know I'm not making things up, it's on page 992 of your Pew Bible.

[6:39] Matthew 28. If you look there in the previous chapter, chapter 27, verse 62 to 66, just a few verses before the chapter that we read.

The chief priests and the Pharisees had gone to Pilate. They said to him, We remember him saying he will rise on the third day. So give us soldiers to guard the tomb, so his followers don't come and steal his body, and then say he has risen.

And then in verse 28, chapter 28 rather, and verse 11 of the passage we read. After the resurrection had taken place, and the soldiers got in his body, started confessing, Hey, the stone is rolled away.

He's not there no more. They came to the chief priests and the Pharisees. After they've done that, these people invented the lie that became the party line.

They've even bribed the soldiers with substantial money to say that his disciples had stolen the body. It's there in verse 13.

[7:59] The chief priests told the soldiers, Tell people, his disciples came by night and stole them away while we were asleep. Isn't it interesting that even before the resurrection happened, the fabrication, in denying it, had already started.

And it continued. That became the party line from the Jewish leaders. Have you ever wondered if it was true that he is now risen? Why couldn't they find the body?

Later on, a few days later, Peter spoke before thousands, Christ, who you crucified, is risen. If it was a lie, it's like me telling you, yes, I know, let's say this is 1776.

Let's go back in time. And I say to you, yeah, I know, I know Judge Washington. He's my, he's my close buddy. He's my friend. You will, you will demand that I come up with the proof because Judge Washington is alive and he can make claims.

And then you go to Judge Washington and say, do you know this guy? You know, that is the kind of, that's the, that's how close this claim is. It's not a long ago claim. It's not to say, yeah, you know, I'm, you know, how people say they're related to somebody in the past, in history, and it's really, really sometimes hard to, to prove it one way or the other.

[9:31] Jesus, the people who were, the primary sources were still around when these claims were being made. Why wasn't it refuted? So, so you, you think in a culture in which people create their own facts and truth, like the culture that we are in today, the church, the church of Christ is perhaps the last defender of objective truth.

Do you know that? If you're part of the church of Jesus Christ, you are a defender and a proponent of objective, factual truth.

And there is no greater fact than the reality of the resurrection. The true church of Christ believe and proclaim, they believe and proclaim the reality of the resurrection as a verifiable fact of history. It's not some fanciful belief that lives only in our collective imagination. It is the reality upon which the world turns. And like all such facts, it is to your detriment if you do not acknowledge it.

After all, if someone were to say, I don't believe in the fact of gravity. If that person says, I believe I can soar. I believe I can touch the sky.

[10:56] And said person goes up and jumps off a bridge or a tall building, what will happen to him? Despite his belief, gravity will happen to him.

The fact of the resurrection is just like gravity. The reality of the resurrection will become apparent. Hear me, people of God. The fact and the reality of the resurrection will become apparent to every soul whether now in faith and submission and acknowledgement of the truth or in death before the judgment seat of God.

So here are the facts as Matthew records it for us in this passage. And he's one of many primary sources who testify to it. In verse 2, we're told that there was a great earthquake towards the dawn of Sunday morning.

An angel descended and rolled back the stone after the earthquake. Now have you pondered, if you're familiar with the story, have you pondered what the stone was rolled away for? Was it so that the risen Christ can leave the tomb?

[12 : 10] Is that why the stone was rolled away? I don't think so. He was already gone from the tomb by the time the angel rolled the stone away. Remember that he appeared in locked rooms before the disciples later on.

The stone was not an impediment to the risen Lord. In verse 5, the angel said to the women who came to the tomb, do not be afraid.

I know, I know you're looking for the crucified Jesus. He's not here. For he is risen, as he said. And then they said to them, come, see the place where he lay.

The stone being rolled away was for the women. It was later for Peter and John as they ran to the tomb. And it's for all who will venture to look, including the soldiers who were guarding him.

It is, the stone being rolled away is for us. It is to verify the truth of the resurrection. If death could not contain him, it would seem silly to think a stone, no matter how large it is, could hold him.

[13 : 25] The stone was for us. So we may verify the truth of heaven's claim about the risen Lord. But here are the evidences on these verses.

There's many more of these evidences to be found in the Gospel of Luke and John. We know that Jesus appeared to the 11 apostles later. And then up to 500 of his disciples at one time, Jesus appeared to them in public.

Jesus, the disciples, touched him. They felt the nail-pierced wound in his hand and side. They had meals with him. He's not an apparition.

He rose bodily. The fact of the resurrection was turned, even turned some, some who were formerly unbelievers, turned them into believers.

James, his brother, was such. And Paul, the most ardent of the skeptics, saw the risen Lord and believed.

[14 : 32] So what of the meaning of the resurrection? Is it necessary that he should rise from the dead? Is it necessary? We know that he died for our sins.

He paid the price, atoned for our sins before God. But is it necessary that he should rise? I invite you to consider this. If by his death he atoned for our sins, carried upon himself the full weight of our judgment, then if he remained dead in the grave, what assurance do we have that he's dead had accomplished all that the Bible claimed?

We will have no assurance. But his victory over death is proof positive that he has paid for all our sins. that the wages of sin, which is death, has been paid for.

All. All of it. Nothing holding him. So death could not hold him. And what are the implications of the resurrection? I think that's where Matthew is actually leading us to.

He wants to give us, he gives us fact, he gives us meaning, but really he's driving us to see the implication. That's really what he wants to talk about in his gospel. I think, and he tells us of the fact, but he wants us to concentrate on what the meaning, the implications of this risen Lord means to us.

[15 : 57] The first implication, I think, is that it should lead us to worship. If Christ is risen, then he is Lord and King.

All is claimed about being the Messiah and a King who comes to us ushering God's kingdom is proven true by his resurrection. Look ahead in chapter 28 to verse 18 there.

We didn't read it in our gospel reading, but look in verse 18. Jesus said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

That's the warrant that demands our worship. This is Evan's cry regarding Jesus. Revelation 5. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

That is what the host of heaven cries unending praise to the slain Lamb who was risen. He has all power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing.

[17 : 08] All authority in heaven and on earth is this. And so when in verse 9, as we see in our reading, when Matthew tells us that the women, when they saw Jesus, what did they do?

They took hold of his feet and they worshipped him. That is the logical reaction to seeing the risen Lord. That is the logical attitude and action to believing that Christ is risen from the grave.

It is to worship. In the ancient Near East, to worship a great king, one will bow down and kiss the ground towards this important potentate.

And that's the meaning of the Greek word worship in the New Testament. It's to kiss the ground towards someone who is superior. That's what the women did here. And that's our proper response to this King of Kings.

I worship for who he is and I'm in gratitude for what he has done in delivering us from the bondage of sin and death. Worship.

[18:21] Secondly, the second implication is that we should be prepared for opposition. The second, you see there, it shouldn't surprise us that many people oppose the truth of the resurrection.

Important people, the powerful people, they oppose the truth of the resurrection. Right from the start, it has been opposed. And the opposition continues. continues. In the first century, the people who were entrusted with this truth of the resurrection, they had no institutional power.

They had no pedigree, these ract-tag disciples. They had nothing to command people's respect and attention. These Galileans were as removed from power and influence as one can be.

yet, harmed with the truth of the resurrection, harmed with the power of the resurrection, which is the Holy Spirit.

[19:27] They went in, responded to their Lord's command, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded.

They went forth, harmed with the fact of the resurrection and they changed the world. You might feel as the people of God in our culture today, just like the apostles in the first century, powerless. The world is rearing against Christ and His church. But, you're not powerless, brothers and sisters, because Christ is risen from the grave, because that is true historical fact, armed with that truth. We're called to go. And that's the third implication. Spread the news to the end of the earth. Notice that the come and see that He is risen of the angels.

Come and see where He lay. Come and see that He's risen. That come and see quickly becomes go and tell that He is risen. The first instruction to the first eyewitness of the resurrection was, come and see where He lay, then go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead.

[20:53] The Lord Himself in verse 10 echoes the words of the angels. Do not be afraid. Jesus told the women, go and tell my brothers.

that is the pattern for all who come to faith in the resurrected Christ. Come to Him, believe in Him, surrender to Him, and then go and tell.

The Church of the Holy Trinity, inasmuch as we obey this command, people of God, inasmuch as we obey this command from our Lord. We are His body.

We go in His power. But, if we were to become complacent, if the preaching of Christ crucified and risen is not our message to the world, if we adopt any other message but that, then we might as well be an elk or rotary club.

Because we're void of power without the power of the resurrection and without the proclamation of it. It is the good news of Jesus that makes us who we are.

[22:08] It is the good news of Jesus that makes us the Church of Christ. It is what we are to proclaim. And notice the wonderful synergy. It's death, burial, and resurrection makes us His body, brings us into His family.

and it is on that basis that we are also meant to go and bring others, go and tell. The meaning of the resurrection is that Jesus Christ has been given all authority in all of life.

He is Lord over every tribe and tongue, over every culture and creed. He is Lord over every sphere of life, over every living creature, over every living soul.

This is our message then. We go out to the world and we tell them that Christ is risen. And we wait for the reply as the Holy Spirit opened blind hearts and minds and they reply, He is risen indeed.

And if you are here, if you are here this morning, and the fact of the resurrection is just mere information to you, the true meaning of it has no bearing on your life, on how you lead your life.

[23:31] May I invite you this morning to come. May I invite you to look again at the story, examine it. I invite you, poke all the holes you want into it.

It bears up. the resurrection took place in time and place and history. This truth will stand up to any honest inquiry.

But at the end of the day, it's not mere human intelligence that will bring you to the truth. You need God Himself to open your hearts and to open your heart.

And He will if you ask Him. So may I invite you to come this morning. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes, open your ears, open your heart.

And if you're here this morning and the resurrection is real for you, you know the meaning of it, it bears meaning to your life, then listen to the words of the Apostle Paul from Colossians 3.

[24 : 40] If the fact of the resurrection is real, then you've been raised with Christ. Seek the things that are above where Christ is seated.

That's seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

That is a marvelous, marvelous good news. Your life is hidden with Christ in God.

And when Christ who is your life appears, when He appears in glory, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

This world, if you believe the fact of the resurrection, this world has nothing for you. This world has nothing to offer you. When you have Jesus, all the world's offerings, no matter how good it seems, are like filthy rags in comparison.

[25 : 52] And alongside that statement is this, there's nothing the world can do to you. Nothing the world can do to you to dislodge you from the love and security of being in Christ.

Nothing. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. You might suffer in this world, you might face tribulations, you might face pitfalls, you might face tragedies, you might face sickness, old age, cancer, loss of loved ones.

nothing this world throws at you will dislodge you from the love and security of being found in Christ. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. And so we long for the day when Christ, who is our life, will appear in glory to transform us into our resurrected and glorious body.

Hallelujah. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.