

The Centrality of the Resurrection to Our Faith

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Preacher: Pastor Kenoyer

[0 : 00] Well, I suppose I should say that I get emotional when I listen to you sing.

! How's that? I do. I enjoy the fact that you enjoy the Lord Jesus and that you are an evidence. I'm hot. I was going to wear my jacket. That is the truth. I really was conditioning myself for that, so bear with me. It is there. It was on stage. Okay. But I listened to you sing this morning, and I think of two things. I think of the fact that God's people sing, first of all, because they are informed by the Scriptures. Isn't that true? I don't know about you, but as I sit here and I listen to our singing, and I'm singing as well most of the time, I am tracking in my mind, and I understand I'm one of those guys that's a multitasker almost to the point of abstraction, but I'm cross-referencing the music and the things that we're singing to various passages. And I have to tell you that it kind of amplifies my delight. And I would pray that you are doing the same thing, that as you are singing, that your mind is kind of searching the Scriptures to see whether these things be so. It's the way it should be. But the second thing that is such a blessing is that what it says in the Scriptures is that people that are Spirit-filled, guess what they do?

They sing. And so, if you're sitting here and you don't know Jesus, I don't expect you to sing. Just listen. We're having a great time. And if you're here and you do know Jesus, but you're kind of into grumpies, you know what I'm saying? I mean, you can do, A, ask the Spirit of God to kind of help you with that, or, you know, there are things you can do, and I would trust that when we come towards the close and we sing again, that you are ready to sing. Let me tell you in advance. When a pastor comes to the pulpit, he comes to discharge a very sober duty. He comes to speak in a tone and with a voice that says, thus saith the Lord. And it is my prayer, and I know that there are many in our fellowship that are praying along with me, that as the Word of God is proclaimed, that those of you who know Christ would have your hearts lifted up through the power of the Spirit, and you would rejoice in the Lord Jesus. And those who are here that do not know Christ would not leave this place without coming to know Christ as their personal Savior. That being my preface, I want you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance to the Scriptures. And he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. Father, we are thankful that as we gather this morning, we gather not to hear what a man thinks, but to hear your Word spoken truly to us.

Through an earthen vessel, and we pray in such a fashion that the glory is of God and not of man. We who know Christ will pray that the Spirit would empower both the man who preaches and the people who love the Lord Jesus, and that their hearts would revel in the finished work of Christ.

[4 : 18] And we will also pray that those who are here today who do not know the Lord Jesus, that today would be the hour of salvation, and that in eternity to come, as they look back across the life that they've lived and the road that they've traveled, they would mark this Sunday as the day when they came to see Christ as their only hope, and they cried out upon Him in whom is salvation alone. And we ask this in Your precious name. Amen.

Amen. Now, I think you know me and Pastor Saul well enough to say that we are not conference junkies. I mean, it's not like we are scampering hither and yon, trying to attend every conceivable conference, and always coming back kind of with that conference suntan. We go occasionally, and there are probably two sets of conferences that Pastor Saul and I have gone to on a regular basis. One would be to the...it's called ACBC now.

Why did they change the name and mess me up? It used to be NANC, and now it's...anyway, it's conferences on counseling, and Pastor Saul and I have enjoyed that and been blessed by it. But

there's another conference that we go to, and it is a conference called The Basics. It is up in Solon, Ohio, with Alistair Begg.

And I know Pastor Saul and I are going again this year, Lord willing, and He should tarry. We look forward to the opportunity we will have of being there. I remember several years ago hearing John Lennox preach, and he preached actually on the book of Revelation. And I can still remember his sermon, and you know me, I'm listening to that sermon, and it kind of builds in crescendo, and I found myself there just...you know how it is. I was at one of those leaky moments as I was just enjoying the magnificence and the glory of Christ and thinking about the day that I am going to see Him face to face. One of the things that I remember John Lennox shared then was that he had been engaged actually in 2007 and 2008 in a debate with a man called John Dawkins. How many of you know Mr. Dawkins personally? No, no, you don't. Okay. Richard Dawkins, actually. It's Richard Dawkins.

I have a couple of you shaking your head and saying, Pastor, you got that one wrong. Check the notes. It is Richard Dawkins. Two times, seven and eight, John Lennox debated him on issues of theology.

[6 : 50] And, you know, it depends on probably which side of the aisle you're sitting on and whether you think Richard won or John won. But at the end of the day, as Richard Dawkins was kind of winding up his dismissive little statements about his adversary, he made this very interesting statement. He said, listen, you really can't be taken seriously because you believe in someone that you believe came back from the dead. And John said, you know, you're entirely right. You're entirely right. All of my life rests upon the reality of the empty tomb. And Richard Dawkins correctly brought the issue of our faith down to that centrality of the empty tomb. And I want us to think this morning of just how core the issue is, how central the empty tomb is in the life of the believer. And I want you to, as we kind of step into this, to understand that the empty tomb really ends up being a dividing point. You either believe in it or you don't.

You accept the fact that Christ rose from the dead and he has significance in your life personally, or you're just kind of going through the motions and you're waiting for the day of your death.

And so I want to break this out in very simple terms. We're not going to be looking primarily at the exegetical aspect of this passage, but we're going to look at the practical aspect of it. And we're going to recognize that the empty tomb puts us on a spot of doing one of two things with the truth of the resurrection. For one, the empty tomb brings some to deny and to doubt.

It's a sobering thing to recognize what the empty tomb has done throughout history. Jesus was crucified and rose again almost 2,000 years ago, and yet that empty tomb stands as a focal point in the thinking and in the conscience of every reasoning person. They either come out on one side or the other as they think about the resurrection. So the empty tomb leads the unbeliever to doubt what Jesus said. It's amazing how often Jesus made it clear that he was going to rise again, and there was no bones about it. As he spoke with other people, he undeniably let them know that he was going to die and he was going to rise again. No question. Let me have you look at a couple different places where this stands out clearly in your text. If you turn back for a moment to John chapter 2. In John chapter 2, Jesus is caring for cleansing the temple. Now, what a way to start a public ministry. Can you imagine that? Stomping into the center of Jewish faith and purging it of all the hypocrisy and the wickedness that was taking place in the sale in the temple. And the Pharisees came and asked him, so what are you doing? And what sign do you give? And that was kind of one of the biggies. You know, what authority, what power, what right do you have to pull this off?

[9 : 54] You know, I'll give you another illustration in relationship to that. Remember when the paralytic man was let through the roof and he lowers down in front of Jesus, and instead of healing him, what does Jesus say first? He says, your sins are forgiven. And everybody is just kind of having this kind of thought pass through their mind, oh yeah, yeah, like who can forgive sins? The answer is what? Who can forgive sins? God. And Jesus says, well, how about this? Take up your bed and walk. Who can heal? Only God.

And here is Jesus having cleansed the temple. He has a question asked to him, so all right, what authority, what right do you have to pull this off? And listen to what he says there in verse 19.

Destroy this temple, talking about his body, and in three days I will raise it up.

The Jews then said, it has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?

But he was speaking about the temple of his body. He was making it clear that he would lie in the

tomb and rise again on the third day. We find the very similar statement actually made in Matthew chapter 20, and I want you to go back there for a moment and look at the text.

Matthew chapter 20, verse 17 through 19. And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will rise the third day.

Now, I want you to understand that for Jesus to not rise again would nullify his message. I was thinking about this in relationship to weathermen.

[11 : 58] And there's no dispersion being cast on weathermen, but you know, weathermen have the privilege of being incorrect. How much? Well, I mean, they say that a good weatherman at least has a 50% error rate.

You know, it's like, other than it is going to have weather. You know, you're going to have weather tomorrow. You're kind of stuck in the fog, and I'm not real sure. I have a son who lives about three and a half hours to the west of us, and when I really want to know what's going to happen in Columbus with about a three-hour lead time, I called Joe, and I said, what's happening in Kokomo? And he tells me, and I think I know what the weather's going to be. You see, weathermen get 50% wrong, but can I tell you something? God, the Son, could not make that kind of prognostication and get away with it.

He was either 100% accurate, and what he said was a fact, or he is a pathological liar. And so here is Jesus making the statement that I'm going to rise again on the third day, and I want you to know that while his disciples didn't believe him, guess who did?

Who was really concerned? Christ's enemies greatly feared what the prospect of his resurrection would be, and if you're there in Matthew, we just stay there for a second, and look at what we find in Matthew chapter 27 in relationship to this.

[13 : 15] Matthew chapter 27, verse 62 through 66. The next day, that is, after the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, Sir, we remember how the imposter said while he was still alive, after three days I will rise.

It wasn't his disciples that had this interest. It was the enemies of Christ. Therefore, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, He has risen from the dead, and the last fraud will be worse than the first.

I want you to understand that unbelievers deny the empty tomb. They do not believe in the significance of Christ being able to rise from the dead, and they have nothing to do with it.

Now, I want you to understand something, that for a person to say, which is a very common statement today, well, Jesus is a good person, and He was a good example.

Now, listen to me. He can't be a liar and a good person as well. Do you follow that? Jesus made the statement, I am going to rise again, and He did.

[14 : 32] And for a person to say, well, He's just a good old guy, well worth following and a nice guy, that's not the case. The unbeliever sits there and says, I don't believe in the empty tomb.

I believe He is telling a lie. I want you to understand, secondly, that the empty tomb leads the unbeliever to dismiss Christ's offer of salvation. The unbeliever looks at the empty tomb, and he dismisses Christ's offer of salvation.

All other religions, and I want you to listen to this very carefully, offer a hope for salvation based on human performance. It's very interesting to ask people, so how are you going to get into heaven?

And I am always kind of stunned when I hear people tell me, well, I've been a pretty good person.

Now, I would agree that they've probably been better than, you know, someone like who?

Hitler? How would that be? Like Pol Pot? Some of you are wondering who that is. You know, like Mao Zedong? I was reading, who was the despot in Libya?

[15 : 47] Help me here. Gaddafi. Gaddafi. Now it comes out that he was an absolute skunk.

Surprise. I'm stunned. Well, you may be sitting here patting yourself on the back saying, I'm not as bad as that.

And you know what? Every one of us sitting here knows somebody worse off than us and worse than we are, right? But that's not the issue. That's not the issue. If you're sitting here and thinking that God is going to let you into heaven because you're not as bad as somebody else, you're in for a rude awakening.

Because what Scripture tells us that is this, is there is none righteous, no, not one. There is not one who will be able to stand before God and say, hey, listen, I got it coming. I've earned my way in here. I've been better than most. Or here's another one. I love this one. I hope my good outweighs the bad. Have you ever heard that one? I hope my good outweighs the bad.

How many of you heard that in Portland there was some young man that relieved him? Now, you know, this is preaching on Easter Day, but bear with me. There was a guy who caused the entire holding tank of the city to be drained.

[16:57] Does anybody know why that happened? Don't say it out loud. But he was doing what little boys sometimes do. And their concern was for the fact that just a little bit was infecting this entire, like 57 million gallons of water, and so they drained the whole thing, right?

How much does it take to pollute the drinking water that you're going to drink? I don't want any in it. And so here you are saying, well, my good outweighs the bad.

I am sorry. That doesn't cut it. And you have to recognize this morning that the world has this idea that you're going to get into heaven because you've been pretty good or you're not as bad as others, and maybe your good outweigh the bad.

I want to tell you something. Jesus came and died on the cross to pay the penalty for all of our sins, and he did so because we cannot get to heaven on the basis of our own effort or our own merit. Only the Lord Jesus can blot out the debt of your sins completely. Only the Lord Jesus can completely forgive you and give you a new life.

[18:06] And I want to tell you, if you're sitting here today and secretly inside of you, the Spirit of God is working right now to convict you of the shame and the guilt and things that nobody else knows that you are burdened for, I want you to understand the only remedy, the only place of forgiveness is with the Lord Jesus Christ and on the cross.

And it is because of the empty tomb and because of the resurrection of Christ that we can take his offer of complete forgiveness seriously and believe that what he says is true.

I want you to understand one other thing. The empty tomb leads the unbeliever to doom for not taking judgment seriously. The unbeliever faces judgment and doom because they've not taken the empty tomb seriously.

I want you to turn over in your Bible just for a moment to Acts chapter 17 verse 30. If you were here on Friday night and you listened to Dr. Tom White preach, he made reference to Mayor Bloomberg. And I know that he made news this last week because he had an interview in which he said that he was absolutely certain he was going to heaven. And he went ahead and let people know that the reason he was going to heaven is because of all the things he has done in New York City on things like banning smoking in public and banning large sugary drinks.

[19:36] I mean, these are deadly issues. And I want you to understand, he has done a great work for public service, right? And also his battle against the NRA and some other things like that.

And here's the guy saying, hey, listen, I get a pass. I get a pass because of all these things that I've done that are responsible. I want you to understand that the idea that we get a pass just because of things we've done is dead wrong.

Listen to what we read in Acts chapter 17. And incidentally, Paul, the apostle, was called to bear witness to the resurrection. That was the thing they were curious about.

Over there in the Agora in Athens, they said, hey, we've been hearing about this deal of the resurrection. And the attitude of the Greeks was that, you know, once you die, you're done. It's over. Curtains. Eat, drink, what? Be merry because tomorrow we die. It's gone. It's over. And listen to how the apostle Paul brings his sermon to a conclusion.

[20:42] Pretty powerful. Acts chapter 17, verse 30 and 31. The times of ignorance got overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

What does it mean to repent? Fundamentally, to repent means, first of all, to come to grips with the sin in your life and your rebellious spirit against God and then, by his power, change your mind about your sin and trust in Jesus Christ alone, who is the complete remedy for the hard, arrogant spirit that you have.

And here it says, God has commended people everywhere to repent. Now, follow in verse 31. Because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. Who's going to judge you for your sins? It is going to be the one who died for them.

The one who was willing to pay the penalty for all of your sins. It was the one who was willing to suffer the wrath and the indignation of his father for your sake.

[22 : 02] That is going to be the one who judges you. And he is the one who is going to pass judgment on you and say, Listen, why did you not believe in what I did for you?

Now, let me explain something about this issue of judgment. It's fairly easy sitting where you are to think for a moment that a future judgment is not all that significant.

But, if someone were back into your car out here in the lobby or in the parking lot, I hope it doesn't happen in the lobby, help us. If someone were back into your car out there in the parking lot, what are you going to do?

You're just going to say, Hey, not a problem. There's no judgment coming. Don't worry about the payment. I'll take care of that. No, you're going to say, Hey, how about we trade information? And what are you hoping the outcome of that information is?

You want something done as a result of the harm that your poor little car has received. Am I right or wrong? See, we kind of like to believe that the person who is impatient and honks at us when we're driving just seven miles over the speed limit, you know, they're really in a hurry.

[23 : 24] What are we hoping is going to happen when they blow our doors off going past us? We're hoping that about a thousand yards down the road, there is a police officer that was waiting impatiently for them, not us.

And we want them dinged for their arrogant, rude, disrespectful, inconsiderate, uncivic spirit. Am I right? We're hoping there's a payday someday for them.

I want you to understand that there will be judgment for every one of us. Christ satisfied the judgment of God against sinners.

And he has granted complete forgiveness to those who have come to him and said, I deserve the penalty of death for my own sin, and yet I believe Jesus died in my place.

Over in Hebrews 2, verse 3, in relationship to this issue of salvation, here's what the scriptures record. How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?

[24 : 28] How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? And I want to tell you, there are some of you sitting here this morning who have sat under the preaching and the teaching of the Word of God, and you have heard it said again and again that sin brings death, and Jesus died in your place, and yet you're saying, I don't want that.

I want you to understand that the day is coming when you will face His judgment. On the other hand, the empty tomb leads those of us who have faith to believe the risen Savior.

And I want you to ponder with me, for one, the empty tomb does a number of different things that are a benefit to us. For one, the resurrection verifies Christ's sacrifice for us.

How do I know that Jesus' death actually paid my debt? Last week, I was working with a friend in India, and we're taking care of some details and actually doing banking transactions.

It's amazing, you know? You can do it electronically in India, and it shows up in your account in America. Or you can do it electronically in America, and it shows up in his account in India. But guess what I was watching over and over again on my iPhone, just to be sure it had taken place.

[25 : 44] What was I doing? I want some confirmation that what he had said was going to happen, in other words, a thousand dollars show up in my account for a little matter that... Anyway, let's go on with that.

He gets instruments from Cleveland, and I care for shipping, okay? So anyway, he sends money, shipping's cared for, and I kept on checking my phone.

I want to see it. I want to see it. I want to see it. I want to know it's there. Come on. Time after time. That's a nice thing about, you know, phones. You follow that? I can check banking. It's amazing.

And so here I am paying attention to that detail.

And when the electronic fund was transferred and I had record of it, you know what? It was verified. I knew it for a fact. It was certain. And the risen Savior, the empty tomb, makes the fact of his sacrifice for us certain.

How do I know that his sacrifice has satisfied my debt? It's because the tomb is empty. Secondly, the tomb guarantees my new life. Over in Romans chapter 6, verse 4 and 5, I want you to look at that just for a moment.

[27 : 03] Romans chapter 6, verse 4 and 5. We were buried together with him in baptism into death.

In order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

We know that the empty tomb guarantees our new life as well. Now, I want you to understand the empty tomb also gives us encouragement that we can change.

One of the things that I know all of us in our innermost being would like to see is that we would change from being who we are to who we should be. And the empty tomb makes it certain that we can change.

You are not doomed to stay the skunk you are. Isn't that good news? How do I know that you are not going to stay the way you are if you are in Christ Jesus? Turn in Ephesians chapter 1.

[28 : 08] Ephesians chapter 1, verse 18 through 21. The apostle addresses the fact that it is the empty tomb that assures us that we are not doomed to be the skunk. We are. We used to be.

Ephesians chapter 1, verse 18 through 21. It says this. Paul is praying that you would understand, verse 19, what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe according to the working of his great power, that he has worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

How do I know that I can change? I know that I can change because I see what Jesus did raising from the dead. I see what God did, the Father raising him up. Now, I want you to understand also that the empty tomb assures us of our own resurrection.

I remember years ago as a very young pastor talking with an older man in ministry and asking him one of those kind of curiosity questions. I was very early in ministry, and I said, so what's the hardest part of doing a funeral?

Without hesitation, he said, the hardest part is when you stand at the graveside and the family is ready to leave. He said at that point, the finality of death is undeniably clear.

[29 : 31] And I have to tell you that as I think about the prospect of death, and I realize that that is an inevitable fact for all of us apart from the second coming of Christ, I want you to know that as I've stood over graves over and over again, and I think about the prospect of my own father's home going, I take great confidence in the fact that those who die in the Lord Jesus do not die in vain, and they die with the prospect of the resurrection.

The other night as I sat by my father's bedside watching with him through the night, I remember at one point deciding that I would read 1 Corinthians chapter 15 to him out loud.

And as I was reading through that passage, I came to that part where it talks about the fact that this flesh cannot get there apart from going through death.

And I am thankful for the fact that when I think about the prospect of my own death, and I think about the prospect of the death of those that I dearly love, here is what I know beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Christ Jesus died in my place, and He died in the place of all who know the Lord Jesus as their personal Savior.

And here's the fact. Those who die in Christ look forward to a resurrection and to a glorified body. And they look forward to eternity in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 01] So the practical question this morning is this. Where are you? I want you to think about that carefully. There are some of you that I sit here and I've watched you for months and years.

I have preached to you and I have pled with you, and I have no confidence in the certainty of your eternal destiny, and I would be remiss in the light of the cross not to plead with you to be reconciled to Christ.

Here's the fact. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And faith means coming to the place where you recognize the absolute moral bankruptcy of your heart, and you cry out to Christ and say, I stand justly condemned.

I have no argument for the arrogant stubbornness of my spirit, and I know that the day of judgment is coming. And I humble myself and I ask Christ Jesus to forgive me for my sins and to save me from my wretched state.

And I would far rather have the one who died and rose again be my Savior than be my judge. And I would plead with you if you are here today and you do not know Christ, now is the accepted hour of salvation.

[32 : 26] Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God, as we rejoice this morning in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as we proclaim the power of the cross, I cannot help but think that there are some here today that need Jesus as their Savior, and I would plead with you that you would bring them to repentance, and that they would cry out on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

And I speak to you who sit here this morning, if you do not know Christ as your Savior, now is the hour, and I would plead with you that where you sit, you humble yourself, lay aside the arrogance and the stubbornness and the belligerence of your spirit and cry out and say, I need Christ as my Savior, not as my judge.

And if that is the prayer of your heart, I encourage you where you are to slip your hand up, humble yourself. I need Christ as my Savior. I am not going to delay. I am going to believe in Him.

Father, draw us to rejoice in Christ or to fear Christ and to be drawn to Christ. I ask this in your precious name.

Amen. John is going to lead us in our closing song, and as we are singing it, if God is prompting your heart, a matter that you need to care for publicly, let's stand together if you would, please.

[33 : 55] We are going to go directly from our singing and closing into our business meeting, and if you're part of our fellowship or you're interested in seeing how our fellowship does business, we encourage you to stay and enjoy this time together as we attend to a matter of business in calling a pastor.

As we sing, if God puts an issue on your heart that you need to care for publicly, you come forward as we sing this song in closing. Thank you.