

Easter Sunday - RESURRECTION - Jesus victory over suffering and death

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[0 : 00] Let's pray together, shall we? Heavenly Father, on this glorious Easter morning, you have given us such good news. Please open our ears that we might hear it. Open up our minds to understand it and open up our hearts to believe it.

That we might live in the light of it all the days of our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Gandalf, I thought you were dead, cried Sam. But then I thought I was dead myself.

Is everything sad going to become untrue? What's happened in the world? A great shadow has departed, said Gandalf. And then he laughed. Ha, ha, ha, ha. And the sound was like music or like water in a parched land.

As he listened, the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment for days upon days without count.

You'll recognise those words. I'm sure they come from the final part of Lord of the Rings, the return of the king. Sam and Frodo have thrown the ring of power into the fires of Mount Doom.

[1 : 11] Sauron has been defeated. And now back in Gondor, Sam has just seen Gandalf for the first time since he plunged into darkness and shadow in the mines of Moria.

And he can't quite believe how wonderfully things have turned out. Hence those questions that point to a beautiful answer. Yes, everything sad is going to come untrue.

Because evil has been defeated once and for all. Now, the Lord of the Rings is just a novel, of course. But what we have before us today isn't fiction, but wonderful history.

World-changing, life-bringing, joy-filled history. Because by his death and resurrection, Jesus has made certain that one day everything sad will become untrue.

And pass from sight and sound and be no more. This is the hope we have been looking for in our series on suffering. A day when all suffering will end.

[2 : 16] A day when death itself will be defeated and the powers of sin undone forever. Here is the hope that can truly keep us going when life gets hard.

So if you've closed your Bibles, do open them up again. Firstly to John chapter 20. That's on page 1089. And come back with me to that first Easter morning. It was a day that dawned without any sense of hope.

Without any sense of hope. You see, despite his clear words, neither the disciples nor the woman who followed Jesus believed him when he said that he would rise again on the third day.

If they had, they would have been gathering at the tomb with the Jewish equivalent of champagnes, party poppers and hats to celebrate. What was about to happen?

But what do they do? Well, instead, the men were in hiding and the women turn up at the tomb with ointment to anoint Jesus' body to give him a proper burial. But what did they find?

[3 : 23] Well, they found the tomb empty. Apart from the grave clothes folded. Can you imagine, can't you, how the women's minds were whirring? Nothing seemed to make sense.

So they ran for the disciples and they came and checked things out and saw them for themselves. When they had gone away, Mary went back into the tomb.

John tells us at that point she sees two angels. That would have freaked her out even more. They told her again that Jesus had risen. But again, she doesn't quite understand.

She heads out into the garden, meets someone who she thinks is the gardener. And then the gardener says her name. Mary.

And she knew it was him. The way Mary grabbed hold of Jesus, seeming to refusing to let him go, was a sign of her joy and delight at seeing her Lord again.

[4 : 22] Maybe she thought the same words that Sam Ganges had used. But I thought you were dead. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world? And of course the answer would have been yes, Mary.

Everything has changed. Everything sad has come untrue. Because Jesus is alive. Jesus is alive. So, as we go through this part of this first passage, I'm going to pick out three words for you. All beginning with R. But for this, I need a bit of help. Hidden around the church are some multicoloured bits of card. And I need some people who are kind of under about 12 to pick them up and bring them out for me.

So, to start with, I'm looking for ones that are bright yellow. Sunny yellow. Not weak, feeble yellow. That's a weak, feeble yellow. That's a bright sunburst yellow.

There should be three more of those. If you've got one, just wave it. And then someone who's under 12 will come and grab it from you and bring it out. Boys, come on, do some work. Come and grab these yellow things for me.

[5 : 39] They're collecting them all. That's it. Bring them out. Because this is going to be our first words. Now, you didn't think you were going to do a spelling test this morning, did you? But you have. But it's easy.

All you've got to do is work out what this word is. What is it? A lefted word. Well, it starts with that one. Let's put that one up there. Is this going to hold my...

Do you hope so? Resurrection. Resurrection. Well done. That's our first word. That's what we see first of all. Resur...

I hope these are going to fit on. That'll be the next problem. Resurrection. Oops. Excellent.

There's our first word. That's the first thing that happens. Don't go too far. You've got to do some more work in a minute. That's the first one. Jesus was dead. And now he is alive again. Now, there was no doubt about his death at all.

[6 : 41] The Romans were great at building underfloor heating, roads, and killing people. They were good at other stuff as well. But that's certainly three. They knew when someone was properly dead.

And at Jesus' crucifixion, to make sure, they took a great spear. They shoved it in Jesus' side. And out came bodily fluids, water and blood, separate from one another.

A sure sign of his death. That was the reason they allowed his body to be taken away and buried.

But now, first Easter morning, Jesus is alive. Again, there had been a resurrection.

But that's not all. We're looking for the red ones now. Who's got the red bit of cards? Go and grab those. You can bring it out for you.

Bring that out, TV. Bring it out. There's another one on the back, look. Four. Bring it out. That's it. We're one, two. Have we got four?

[7 : 41] Excellent. Let's see if we can get these words in order. Right. What have we got this time? It starts with res again. What have we got this time?

What's going to come next? Yes. Well done. Well, where's the tor? There we go. Not just a resurrection. But a restoration.

That's the second amazing thing that happens on that first Easter morning. Not just a resurrection, but a restoration. See, Jesus' body had been restored to perfect health.

It wasn't simply as that he kind of got up after a bit of a long down and long lie down in a nice cool place. And was now hobbling around, barely able to walk on those nail pierced feet.

He wasn't still oozing blood from his nail pierced hands or his side. He wasn't still wracked with pain after the brutal beating and violent crucifixion.

[8 : 47] No, Jesus' body had been restored. The scars on his hands and feet and side were still there, but they had now been glorified. They were marks of victory.

Marks that helped his disciples know that it was him. But make no mistake, this was Jesus resurrected and restored. Which means that there could now be a third wonderful thing as well.

This time we're on blue bits of card. Who's got the blue bits? We've got two. I think there might only be two this time.

I can't quite remember. We've got three bits.

Okay, what do you think it is this time? Starts with a re again. Reunion. That one first.

[9 : 48] Can you tell me what it is? Reunion. Reunion. That's right. After a resurrection and a restoration, there could be a reunion.

A reunion. A reunion of friends, of relationships restored, rebuilt, recharged with fresh hope and a more complete faith.

So think what the disciples got to enjoy on that day and on the coming weeks. Mary, first of all, got to hold on to Jesus. Not as long as she would like, but she got to hold him.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus got a sermon and a Bible study and got to almost think about having a meal with him. Back in the upper room, the disciples met him and saw Jesus eat.

They received peace from him. Later, they would eat with him, learn from him, talk with him. Peter was forgiven by him and welcomed back in. The disciples even got a barbecue on the beach with Jesus.

[10:52] Jesus' resurrection meant a glorious reunion. Those precious relationships that looked as if they were over forever were restored and renewed. On that first Easter day, there was a resurrection, a restoration and a reunion.

No wonder the disciples were overcome with joy at the sight of their risen Lord. And friends, we have those same things to look forward to. The same things.

We are joined by faith to Jesus. Then we know for certain that the grave has no power over us. That though we die, we will live again. We will be resurrected.

And when Jesus comes again, the Bible tells us that we will have bodies modelled after his. We will be restored. Those dodgy knees, gone. Those wobbly hips, gone.

The glasses, thrown away. Any signs of cancer or asthma or anything else that blights your life, gone forever. As our bodies are made perfect in the kingdom of our coming King.

[11:54] And then we will get a glorious reunion. Firstly with the Lord. And then with all those who have followed and trusted in him over the ages. Jesus rising from the grave has changed everything for us as it did for the disciples.

This is now our hope. This is our joy, our future. It's why, incidentally, we can walk with Jesus through our suffering and keep trusting him. It's why we can continue to pray to him through our suffering.

It's why we can even rejoice in God in the midst of our suffering. Jesus' resurrection, restoration and the glorious reunion has changed everything.

Because in time, everything sad will become untrue. But there are even greater things than this. Greater things than this.

Because of Jesus' resurrection. So flick back in your Bibles to Hebrews. Or flick on, sorry, to Hebrews chapter 2. Page 1202. I want to pick out three more things that this passage tells us about the results of Jesus' resurrection on that first Easter morning.

[13:06] This time we're looking for the light yellow ones. The light yellow ones. I think there's only two. There's one. There's the other one. I hope there's only two. We're running out of washing line.

I think Jodie's running out of paper. There we go. What word have we got this time? Glory. Glory we have.

Well done. Glory. There is glory.

Let me read you verse 9. But we see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Despite the crazy notions that were in one of the tabloid papers earlier in the week, Jesus' body is not lying in a secret compartment at the bottom of an Egyptian pyramid. I think that was a daily star.

[14:12] So enough said. Right now, Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with honour and glory. It's a position that is his by virtue of the fact that he is the eternal son of God.

It is also his, Hebrews tells us, because of his willingness to suffer death on the cross in our place. To the victor the spoils, they say, don't they? And Jesus won the victory.

And so his spoils is this place of honour. But look down at verse 10. The glory that belonged to Jesus is also given to those who trust in him.

See, whatever glory this world has to offer, it is fleeting. Today's heroes are tomorrow's nobodies. But the glory of the risen and ascended Lord lasts forever.

And because of his death and resurrection, you and I are invited to share that glory with him. Just think about that for a moment. The glory due to Jesus is available to us.

[15:13] We will share in that if we trust in him. We may not shine with the glory of God now. That we may be battered and bruised by hard trials. We may be crushed by sufferings and griefs.

So that our bodies and our lives may look anything but glorious. But one day we will. One day, because Jesus rose again, we will share in his glory.

And just as his broken and nail-pierced body now radiates the glory of God, so one day will we. What an amazing thought that is. Here's the second thing.

Looking for the orange cards. Who's got the orange ones? A good Luton Town colour. One, two, there should be another one hidden somewhere.

Come on, who's got an orange one? Have a look. For some of you, this is the first time you've bent down today.

[16:16] That's alright. Just be gentle getting up. There it is. Well done, Richard. Excellent. Right, what have we got this time? Holiness.

Right, who's got the... Where's the H? There we go. Let's put that one right first. Holiness. Holiness. Verse 11. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. Why was Jesus able to act as our sacrifice on the cross?

Because he was the holy, perfect son of God in whom there was no deceit nor sin to be found. Throughout his whole life, Jesus kept all the commandments. Unlike us, he loved God and loved his neighbour perfectly all the time.

As we acknowledged earlier on, you and I are not like that. We may not be mass murderers or terrorists, but we are often selfish and unkind.

[17:32] We do get rude and impatient. If we're honest, we know that there is so much good that we know we should do that we don't do. And there is so much wrong things that we know we shouldn't do that we do do.

It's not just me, is it? We're all like that. Book of Common Prayer, General Confession says that there is no health in us. And it's absolutely right.

And our unholiness, our sinfulness contributes to the pain and suffering of this world. Both to ourselves, causing ourselves grief, and to others. And the sin and wickedness of others does the same to us too.

And yet, what does Jesus accomplish for us on the cross? Through repentance and faith in Jesus, through his death and resurrection, our sins are forgiven.

Our debt is paid. Our shame is washed away. And we're not just counted righteous in God's sight. The resurrection of Jesus made it possible for the Spirit to come.

[18:39] So that we, with his help, can be made holy and become more like him. We're meant to be changed. To be more like Jesus.

It's meant to be the case as we go through our Christian lives, that our bad habits fall away, that our weaknesses go, that our desires get made perfect. That even our thoughts and our kind of yearnings that we have are more shaped by the yearnings and desires of Jesus than our own fallen selves.

We're meant to grow in holiness. Now, like sharing in the glory of God's, complete holiness is something that we will have to wait for, for eternity to fully experience.

But through the work of the Spirit, it is something that will be there in us now, in greater measure, day by day. As daily we turn from sin and turn to Christ.

As we stop walking our own way and we start walking in his way, God changes us by his Spirit. Bit by bit. Growing in holiness. So one day we will be as holy as Jesus.

[19:52] Isn't that extraordinary? Made as perfect as our Saviour. Here's the last one. We're looking for the green cards. Who's got the green ones? Last one.

There's one there, there's one there. I think, again, there's only two this time. We'll see where we get out. Whether there are only two, whether it spells a word or there's something missing.

What have we got? Does it look like there's something missing? Tory. Tory. No, we're not made conservative, Father Gabbas. There should be something else.

Who's got the other green one? Come on, look over those seats. Oh, there's one over there.

There's one over there. Quick, quick, quick, quick. Someone run and grab it. There it is.

[20:59] Phew. Have you worked out what it is now? Victory. Right, give me the first bits.

There we go. There we go. It's almost like I've measured it, isn't it?

I haven't. But it worked out well. Victory. Verses 14 and 15. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shed in their humanity, so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the

power of death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

There is a victory that Jesus wins that we get to share in. See, if we're honest, Jesus' death looked anything like a victory, did it? Crucifixion was not just an excruciatingly painful way to die.

It was utterly humiliating. Victims were crucified naked, often after brutal beatings. They were subject to mockery of passers-by.

[22 : 16] And that was the case with Jesus. The sign above his head may have declared him to be the king of the Jews, but he didn't look like a king. And he didn't look anything like a victor.

What's more, when the sky grew dark for three hours at midday, and Jesus experienced separation from his father, it looked to all the world as if Jesus were the one facing the wrath of God being poured out on him.

And of course that is true, isn't it? God's wrath was being poured out on Jesus, but not because of anything he had done, but rather like the lamb in the Passover sacrifice, and the day of atonement.

All the sin was passed on to Jesus, and he took the punishment we deserve. He died because of our sin, our wickedness, our guilt. That's why Jesus' final cry was not a cry of defeat.

He didn't shout, Phew! That's over. I've had enough. He shouted out, It is finished. Job done.

Mission accomplished.

[23 : 25] Because he knew that sin's debt had been paid in full. And then came Easter morning. And Jesus burst from the tomb, showing that death itself had been defeated.

A great battle had been fought, and won by Jesus, our champion. And wonderfully, with all those who are joined to him by faith, we get to share that victory, and enjoy the spoils.

We get to know now, and to experience that death has been defeated, and to have no fear of death.

Those things no longer have a hold on the Christian. We get to live now without guilt or shame, because the penalty of our sin has been paid in full.

And even temptation is no longer overpowering for the believer, because Jesus' power is now in those who follow him. And even suffering has no power to crush us.

Because we know that one day, when Jesus comes again, and all things in all creation are fully and utterly subject to him. That's what verses 5 to 9 are pointing to. On that day, all suffering and death and sin and temptation, and evil and fear and slavery, will be no more.

[24 : 39] It's just a matter of time, until that happens. Do you see how that can change our attitude to suffering? See, we can endure it patiently, in faith and trust, because we know that it will not last forever.

Paul describes our suffering and trials, and to be honest, he knew far more about that than any of us ever will. He describes them as momentary and light. And then he says this, therefore we do not lose heart.

Though outwardly we may be wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day, for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

And so we fix our eyes on what is not seen, but what is unseen. Since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

That first Easter day brought a resurrection, a restoration, and a beautiful reunion. And one day, because of Jesus' victory over sin and death and the devil, all those who trust in Jesus will get to share those with him and enjoy them for himself, along with his holiness and glory, and a kingdom where his victory will be complete.

[25 : 59] And death and pain and suffering and loss will be no more. That is the great Christian hope. That is the result of Easter. And all that remains this morning is to ask you whether you want to share that victory too.

Because the offer is there for all who come, but you do need to come. It's like you've been invited to a glorious restaurant. The food is on the table, but you need to sit and you need to eat.

And there is no other route to heaven and glory. There is no other way to experience eternal life with that resurrection, restoration and reunion outside of Jesus.

He said that he was the way, the truth and the life, that no one comes to the Father except through him. He is the only way. But because of his resurrection, that way is open.

So will you come? If you haven't ever accepted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, will you come to him today? Will you place your life and your hope in the one with those nail-pierced hands?

[27 : 12] Will you take hold of that free gift of eternal life and full forgiveness that he offers you?
Will you take up your cross and follow him as your Lord and King?

If so, then his victory will be your victory. And his glory and his holiness will be yours to enjoy on the day of that final resurrection and restoration and reunion.

That door is open for you today because the grave is gloriously empty. Will you come? I pray that you will.

Amen.