

Easter Sunday - John 20:1-18 “Resurrection Ramifications”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

What a joy to hear you all sing. In case you haven't noticed it yet, that's our story around here. It's life and hope and grace found not in ourselves, but in our crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ. That's all we got, okay? That's all you're going to hear. It's not going to get any better than that, even though I will take more than 10 minutes to talk about it. See, I only talked for two minutes this morning at the sunrise service, so you should have come earlier because this time it takes me longer to say the same thing.

But that's okay, right? Because y'all wanted to hear me talk about Jesus a little bit, right? That's what we came for. Is that okay? Please say yes. Yes. Okay. Maybe. What a joy that is.

That it's not that y'all specifically want to hear me talk about Jesus, but that I get the privilege of telling people I love about God who loves them. Man, what a joy. I get that privilege regularly, and especially on Easter, we get a chance to say He's here, and we're hearing from Him because He's with us.

That's why we've been studying through the book of John over the last years to encounter Jesus Himself through the eyes of His closest friend. Now, nearly everyone in the world believes that Jesus lived. That's true for almost everyone. In fact, most people acknowledge that His life was a turning point in world history where we even count years before His birth and after His birth.

[2 : 03] Many have observed that His life fulfilled many prophecies that were written hundreds of years before His birth. Statisticians tell us that the odds of one person fulfilling even just 48 of these prophecies are something like 1 in 10 to the 157th power. It looks something like that. I don't do great with math, but it means it's rather unlikely. And scholars estimate that Jesus fulfilled over 300, not 48, but over 300 such prophecies. But the one of those that people have the most trouble believing He fulfilled is the one we're specifically talking about today. Some people actually believe not just that Jesus lived, but that He lived twice, that He walked out of the grave. That may seem crazy, but I'd suggest to you this morning each of us has to decide what we're going to do with Jesus.

What do we believe about Him? He's such an influential figure. He's one who, from what we're told, invites us to be a part of something history-changing, life-changing, bigger than ourselves.

Don't we long to be a part of something bigger than ourselves? What are we going to do with Jesus? What would the ramifications be for our world and for our lives if He did rise from the dead, if He did live twice, if He does live now? What difference does that make?

I'd invite you to consider that with me as we consider John's first story of the risen Jesus. Jesus. Many in these first 19 chapters we've studied have encountered Jesus, but now He's died on a cross. He's been confirmed dead by Romans and Jews. He's been buried.

And this first Easter morning will be the first encounter with Jesus newly alive. Follow along as I read the first 18 verses of John 20. This is God's Word.

[4 : 28] I'm going to read from the Gospel of John, actually, not from Revelation chapter 20. That was about to be really interesting. Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early while it was still dark and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him. So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb.

Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following Him, and went into the tomb.

He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.

For as yet they did not understand the Scripture that He must rise from the dead. And then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

[5 : 51] And as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, Woman, why are you weeping?

She said to them, They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him. Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing. But she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.

Jesus said to her, Mary. Mary. She turned and said to Him in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. Jesus said to her, Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to My brothers and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, and that He had said these things to her. Pray with me.

[7 : 12] God, we need Your help this morning. You sent Mary to tell. You've sent me to tell of this. You've sent us to tell.

And we need help to know, to understand, to believe, to be changed. We ask for Your Spirit to speak through Your Word to our hearts.

That we might not just hunt some eggs and dress up and take some pictures, but that we might meet Jesus, knowing that we'll never be the same if we do.

And so we ask it in His name. Amen. Amen. John knows how to set a grand stage.

He opens His book with, in the beginning. And He then proceeds to tell, not about the creation of the earth, that's the one that starts that way back in Genesis, but about the Creator of the earth.

[8 : 23] The One who spoke light into darkness was coming to shine light into darkness. darkness. Darkness, see, because right after that Genesis account of creation, we see Adam.

Adam's the gardener put in that beautiful garden, and he messes up the world by preferring his own way to God Himself.

Darkness enters. Death. Distance from God. These are the stories of human history. And now, John begins to show us something so grand that it could only be described as new creation.

Notice just a couple details in verse 1. On the first day of the week, that's when it all started in the beginning, in a garden, out of darkness, life coming out of the tomb.

Mary, I'll tell you more about her in a few minutes. She's a follower of Jesus. She encounters then a gardener coming this time, not to bring death to the world by His selfish rebellion, but rather to bring life to the world by His selfless sacrifice.

[9 : 49] Something is really different. New creation is happening. That's the stage John sets. So if you think that we're overblowing the scope of this story by wearing fancy clothes and singing happy songs, trust me, I can't do justice to how magnificent, how life-changing, how earth-shattering this story should be.

But as grand as this story is, it is profoundly personal. Personal in two ways that I don't want us to miss this morning.

We'll just look at those two things. First, notice the personal resurrection. I know that was a tough first point to figure out on Easter.

Maybe a bit obvious if you read the passage. But the focus of this entire account is a person. Jesus.

Why is His tomb empty? Where's His body? What's going on with His grave clothes? Who moved His body and where'd they take it? It's concern about Jesus Himself that sends Mary to find Peter and John, that sends them rushing to the tomb.

[11 : 09] And there, these two disciples view the linen cloths that Joseph and Nicodemus have carefully wrapped Jesus' body in. And John describes it for us in what can only be described as firsthand detail.

This is what He saw. The word for saw used here is one that means analyzed, reasoned about, considered.

The cloths and the face cloth folded up and lying separately. John starts thinking that they have the appearance of a body inside them having just disappeared.

That's what the words mean. They're neatly still in place like think of a chrysalis that a butterfly has just come out of and you see where it was.

And John starts thinking to himself, well, hold on, this is no work of friends who never would have exposed Jesus' naked, tortured body if they were taking it away.

[12 : 15] On the other hand, this is no work of enemies. No, grave robber would slow down to unwrap a body and then carefully, carefully lay the cloths right back in place.

No way, not when grave robbery is a capital crime. It's not happening. Something otherworldly is going on here. John looks and sees and believes.

This must be, he's seen too many of it. It must be miracle working Jesus again. He doesn't know everything. He didn't understand that the prophecies said a resurrection would happen but John believed Jesus was alive.

Think about that. Jesus, the man we walked and talked with, the one that we ate with, we've been with him for three years. We just saw him hung on a cross.

He's alive. He really bodily, bodily rose from the grave and appeared to hundreds of people in the days ahead. More to come next week.

[13 : 24] But that's the story of the Bible, y'all. That's the good news of Jesus. See, Christianity is about a person. I don't want to overcomplicate it this morning.

His personal bodily resurrection is at the heart of the message that changes the world and keeps changing it. Just as John was careful last week to show us that Jesus was really dead, now he is careful to testify to us that Jesus is really alive.

And that's a huge deal. It's really important. We'll just start with this reason because remember, we had real debt. Remember that? That we'd accrued against God?

We had real debt that needed a real payment to be made for that debt. And Jesus said what? It is finished. Remember on the cross?

Paid in full as he poured out his life on the cross. And now this empty grave is the receipt, if you will, for that payment that Jesus has made in full for our debt.

[14 : 34] Listen, when Jesus wrote that check, it didn't bounce, did it? That credit card did not get declined. The God of all, the Lord and giver of life, accepted that payment of the sin-bearing substitute and says, paid in full.

We need it to be real. Real human flesh paid for real human sin and rose in a real human resurrection. A nice idea of resurrection won't do it.

See, I want to make sure you hear how important this is. Because even many churches across the city and beyond will tell you today to think about ideas like resurrection, new life, hope for change.

but they'll say the story of the resurrection that we just read is pretty far-fetched. It's a metaphor.

It's a powerful idea with really no basis in reality. But don't worry, it doesn't need to be real. It's a powerful idea. I mean, right here, many of us go to this church and others just because we want our kids raised on the principles of Jesus.

[15 : 57] Because the moral structure is commendable. Because they really need it these days. But listen, Christianity is not about a set of principles.

It's about a person. Jesus' resurrection, never more to die, gives you a true reason to care for this world and the people who live in it.

Because they will truly last. It's not true that the motivation to moral living is just the same regardless of the reality of the resurrection and eternal hope.

I mean, just prove that to you with a couple of examples. Think about that. Consider the motivation of a group of workers who are building a house that they're told that they will personally live in for the next 50 years after they finish it.

versus their motivation if you tell them as they begin the project that right after they finish it, a tornado is gonna blow through, destroy the house and nobody will ever live in it. It's a different motivation.

[17 : 03] Consider a group of students working on a group project that they're told will never be graded. How hard you gonna work, kids? Pouring all your extra time into that one? What about the difference if you're told that the grades you make on this will be the only thing that will decide whether or not you get into college?

All of a sudden there's a different motivation. Consider even the difference in a teenager getting dressed to go to bed versus getting dressed for pictures that will live on online.

I assure you there's a difference. The motivation is different when the result really lasts. So Jesus, rather than tell us to care for the earth even though it will eventually implode and cease to exist, rather than tell us to be kind to people near death who won't exist afterwards, rather than tell us to pursue a just society even though it's an accidental blip on a cosmic radar and soon will disappear, Jesus says, care for the earth because I'm alive and remaking it into my eternal home with you.

That's what Easter says. Jesus says, love your neighbors because they're made in the image of a God who's alive and they will live bodily, personally, forever.

Jesus says, pursue justice on behalf of the oppressed because even your feeble efforts here are not in vain because I'm alive and I will set all wrong things right forever.

[18 : 45] Come with me in that, I'm doing an amazing work, he says. All of that is true because Jesus really rose from that tomb. If he didn't rise, we are still in our sins.

We have no receipt to prove otherwise. We're to be pitied for living only for this life. Oh, if he didn't rise, you might as well live very different lives.

But Christ has been raised from the dead. Nothing can stop God from bringing life to this world. He's recreating, right? Remember that Jesus and John is showing us what God is really like in the flesh.

Here he is powerful to recreate light overcoming darkness, life invading death. That's why we celebrate Easter because there's real hope. If you want to make me cry, it's apparently easier these days.

Someone said to me the other day, well, it's like two out of three sermons lately. Yeah. I don't think it's that bad. Don't check the tape on that.

[19 : 58] If you want to make me cry, just show me videos of soldiers returning from war to surprise their families at a sporting event or a school or wherever it is.

It gets me every time. The personal impact of dad or sister or husband showing up. It's so powerful.

I told you a few weeks ago of the young boy whose dad went off to war and he kept a picture of his dad beside his bed to comfort him when things were hard.

But one night when it was really hard, that wasn't enough. And he, through his tears, said to his mother, I just want daddy to come out of the frame.

He wanted his father there personally, bodily, not just another picture, not just a nice thought or an idea of dad. and we reflected then how wonderful it was that our heavenly father comes out of the frame to enter into our sorrows.

[21 : 08] That Jesus really suffers in this world, in the flesh. He doesn't leave us alone in our pain. But can you imagine how much more amazing, how much more life changing it would be if that young boy had just been told that his dad died in combat?

How many more tears he cried? How much more desperate he was? And then a few days later his dad shows up and wraps his son in his arms and lifts him up high.

Can you imagine how much that would change things if he not only came out of the frame but walked out of the grave? Not merely entering our suffering with us but conquering our greatest enemy for us?

How much more does that change things? How much more joy? How much more life? How much more hope? Interestingly, Peter and John don't yet encounter the risen Jesus, do they?

Not in this story. They do what you might do this Easter, they go back to their homes. See, they have the principles but not yet the person.

[22 : 25] and it's not enough to transform their lives, is it? Just wait. Mary gets to be first.

This is one of my favorite personal encounters with Jesus in the whole Bible. I know some of you really love it too. Mary stands outside the tomb, still weeping.

The others have gone away. Why? Well, some background may help. Jesus changed Mary's life completely just a couple years ago when he cast seven demons out from her.

She's been following him since then. She was one of the very few friends at the cross when Jesus died with him to the bitter end. She is now clearly grieving the loss of Jesus' life changing presence with her.

She's searching everywhere for his body. We all know tears like this. I want to encourage you to put yourself in the story here for a minute.

[23 : 36] It's a little bit hard for some of you because I know it's Easter and you thought maybe I'm safe coming. They'll be happy and they won't make me think about the hard things. I get it. But we've all cried tears like this at the grave of a loved one.

Right? Feeling that ache of death and separation. Maybe the tears are tears of disappointment in a life that used to have this clear path that made sense.

A future that was full of hope and purpose. It was free from death and war and injustice and now that life path seems gone.

Maybe they're fearful tears for you. Tears of not being enough. afraid demons from my past will catch up to me now.

Some combination of those tears makes Mary long for Jesus. Don't you love how as you read through these verses nothing will satisfy her except Jesus himself.

[24 : 54] Peter and John where's Jesus? two bright shining angels not even distracted by y'all. Where's Jesus? People are usually afraid of us.

No, no, where's Jesus? Some gardener guy outside the tomb not paying attention to him, not even giving him the time of day. Where's Jesus? Not a beautiful longing.

But her tears and her frantic grief keep her from recognizing Jesus until Mary.

The good shepherd calls his sheep by name and they know his voice. There's a personal resurrection of Jesus.

All of a sudden things change for Mary, don't they? That personal resurrection of Jesus means there's a personal relationship for Mary with her Lord. His one word changes everything.

[25 : 58] He lives my teacher, savior, Lord. Throws herself around him. See, because he lives, the demons that haunt Mary's life are gone forever, aren't they?

He's already shown his power over them once and if this is no failed Messiah, no dead rebel, then he is the real deal and those demons are really defeated.

Nobody else ever could, but this guy, if he's with me, I know who's in charge. He's come out of the frame and out of the grave, so I have hope instead of endless sorrow.

I'm no longer most to be pitied with hope only for this life that maybe I'll have a little better day tomorrow, a little more comfort next time. No, no, no, eternal life, beyond the grave with all of those things removed from it.

The good news of Jesus is that he really died to pay the penalty for all your sins and failures, that he really rose from the dead to show that God has accepted that payment in full and give you resurrection power.

[27 : 11] Death no longer holds you captive. It's a personal thing that Jesus has done. Pastor Andrew Murray once said, a dead Christ I must do everything for.

A living Christ does everything for me. You get that? Can you believe that? A living Christ does everything for me.

He's paid it all. He's with me now. He's never leaving me. I can rest in him. That's true that you may still battle demons because we're all still in this groaning world.

But if you trust this resurrected Savior, you're united with him today and you will surely be united with him in a resurrection like his.

That's Romans 6. You'll never be the failure that you're afraid you are. You'll be the glorious child of God that he created you to be forever. Your best days are always ahead.

[28 : 11] That's the good news of Jesus. Because he lives, Mary's now known instead of insignificant, distant from the one who loves her.

Jesus doesn't preach a long sermon, does he? Some of us could learn from that. He doesn't spend a lot of time with her explaining how resurrection works, the nature of the new body, glorified.

what does he do? He calls her name. Do you need to hear Jesus speak your name this morning?

It really helps if you're named Mary. You can't really read yourself right in. Do you need to hear him say Joseph, Gabriella, David?

David? Jesus sees you. Jesus understands your tears.

[29 : 25] He knows your sorrows, yours specifically, and he comes to you to call you his own by name, not forgotten, no way.

you're not abandoned, not by him. He will never let Mary go, even when she has to leave his side for the mission on which he sends her.

It's okay, she can't because he's with her. Because he lives, she's no longer alone. In fact, she has a new community instead of isolation.

Notice what he sends her to announce to his disciples, to embrace for herself. tell my brothers, Jesus says, that my father is their father, that my God is their God.

Jesus' resurrection brings us into a family with people of all sorts of stories and none of us has it all together. None of us has it all figured out. I mean, think about that.

[30 : 30] Are you serious, Jesus? These failures who just abandoned you, who fell asleep at the wheel when you really needed them, who let you down, tell them to buzz off while you win the victory and claim all of the glory for yourself.

You tell them, Jesus, nope. Go tell my brothers, he hasn't called them that often, go tell my brothers that you've seen me and that I say, we're family forever.

forever. What grace in Jesus' words. Remember, Jesus is showing us what God is like in the flesh. We've already seen his power to bring life, to recreate.

Now we see part of that new creation is remaking us in his image, in his family. What do we see about God here? We need to know this, that nothing can stop him from being in relationship with you, nothing.

That's why he's made the long journey, fought the enemy, paid the price, faced death itself head on, emerged from the grave victorious, and come back to call you by name, to call you by name and say, I understand your tears.

[31 : 57] I know you're hurting. I know life is hard. I've lived it. I know death looms. I've felt it. That's why I came and I've come back for you to wipe all of your tears away.

I don't know all of the reasons you may have tears today. I will tell you after the sunrise service, in just a few minutes, people came up to talk to me about tears from miscarriage, job loss, death of a loved one, depression, debilitating injury.

Y'all, it's Easter. And this is what we're sharing with one another about. Saying, well, sometimes I can't even see Jesus through all the tears.

It's too hard. It's too much. I don't know what it is for you, but I know this. Derek said it at the beginning of the service.

If Jesus really walked out of the grave and really calls you by name, then whatever it is, it's going to be okay in the end.

[33 : 23] it will be. You can trust him. No matter how hard it is, and it's really hard and you don't have to pretend it's not. He's got this.

He's alive. He's got you. Just a couple of years ago, the last time I preached this passage, he showed up in my life.

I was in a season of excessive self-focus. I was not caring well for others. I could feel it. I was frustrated. I was disappointed in myself.

I was thinking things like, I know the principles about Jesus, but Jesus himself, the person, feels distant. I was saying, I need him to show up, but I'm afraid he won't.

But he did to remind me that I was his and that he had me. Just last week, I was confessing some sins to a trusted friend.

[34 : 36] He listened patiently, took a while, usually does when I talk, especially does when I need to confess. When I finally stopped, he said something like this.

Will, before I share something with you, I just want you to know those things in your heart and life are real and awful. Jesus went to the cross and paid for them completely.

And he rose from the grave because he wanted you to live with him even though you struggle like this. Will, he loves you even when you don't feel lovable.

It was as though sitting at Eggs Up Grill, Jesus called me by name and spoke to me words of life and grace and peace to my heart.

It was like he spoke of himself. what a gift that is. Maybe you're wondering this morning if that personal relationship with Jesus is real or just pastor talk, church speak.

[35 : 50] I'd encourage you not to take my word for it but would you ask Jesus himself? Would you set aside some time to talk with him? To ask Jesus if he's real to speak to you, to read his word, maybe just read through the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John over the next few days to encounter Jesus.

It doesn't take real long, honestly. Ask him to show you who he is. Because I mean here's the deal for me, if Christianity is a person not a set of principles don't reject it without encountering him.

In fact if Christianity is a person not a set of principles don't claim to embrace it without encountering him. You may be in church like this every Easter and you may think none of this stuff about Jesus matters at all.

Would you ask him to show you who he is? Ask Jesus to call you by name. Ask him, challenge him to show you how a relationship with him can change your life.

And it's not just you. This is why you can be assured that everything no matter what it is everything will ultimately be okay. See because he's alive entering into a relationship with Jesus believing into him makes you part of something bigger than yourself just like you've been longing for.

[37 : 19] We saw hints of this in bringing you into community but Jesus says he's making all things new not just you. Listen to Revelation 21.

The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they'll be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more.

Neither shall there be mourning or crying or pain anymore for the former things have passed away and the one seated on the throne says behold I am making all things new.

Remember John has given us an account of a new creation so life starts to flow doesn't it? Not just to Mary's soul as wonderful as that is but to her body as her tears clear and she can see Jesus.

Not only to her but also to the people around her that Jesus sends her to. Not only to all those people but but to the entire creation groaning since our rebellion broke it to the to the world that is haunted by death that will now be flooded with life because God has come to live here and that's what happens when he's present.

[38 : 39] Jesus will make this world new with passionate commitment because he like Mary like you and me has shed tears at the grave of a loved one hasn't he?

He knows those tears he hates death he longs to remove all its effects on the world and people he lovingly created you can count on his commitment to wipe all of those tears away one day he's going to make all things new he's going to destroy death forever swallow it up in his victory make his blessings flow as far as the curse is found joy to the world the Lord has come and he's coming back alive forever never more to die that's our hope Jesus wipes Mary's tears away with his personal presence and then he sends her to share the good news what is it?

I've seen the Lord tears are being wiped away mourning is over because death has died because Jesus is alive your relationship with God and then your relationship with your spouse your kids your parents your friends your neighbors your body your work your schedule whatever it is that's broken and is tormenting you all of those relationships now have hope not in the mere idea or the power of positive thinking but in a risen savior and the power of a life giving relationship healing God who walked out of the frame to enter your pain and walked out of the grave to give you life forever let's pray

Jesus I just ask this morning that you would encounter each of us that you would speak personally and powerfully because we need to hear your voice I do all of us do would you assure us of your love would you remind us of your power would you comfort us with your presence never ever to leave us thank you that you're alive we rejoice in that and we thank you in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org