

"The Risen Lord"

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[0 : 01] Well, good morning, church. Would you turn with me again to Luke chapter 24? I'd like to pick up Luke's resurrection narrative in verse 36.

So that's page 832 in the Pew Bible. Let me encourage you to follow along there. We will look at Luke 24, 36 through 49. Let me pray, and then I will read for us.

Father, on this great day when we remember and celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, grant us by your Holy Spirit open minds and receptive hearts to embrace the risen Christ and to live in the hope and the power of his resurrection.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Amen. All right, so Luke 24, 36 through 49. As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, Peace to you.

But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.

[1 : 18] Touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat?

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

Well, from the earliest days, Christians defined their message, their belief, their understanding of the person of Jesus with a word that we translate into English as gospel, or better translated, good news.

[2 : 41] You know, but the funny thing is that this word that they used to encapsulate their message, gospel, good news, it wasn't necessarily a religious word.

It wasn't a word that you'd hear at the local temple or visiting the local shrine. In fact, you were more likely to hear the word gospel or good news in the marketplace or in the Senate. It was what we might call today a secular word, a word about realities in this world.

You know, the word gospel was used in the Roman Empire often to describe great victories that had been won or momentous events that changed the live reality of those in the empire.

Something like, you know, Caesar has conquered the barbarians along the Danube. Send forth the good news. Our borders are now safe. Four is over. Prosperity is on the way. You know, some kind of imperial edict like that.

But isn't that interesting? For the first Christians, what happened in the person of Jesus was not an event that could be relegated or put into a merely religious or spiritual category.

[3 : 52] Instead, it had profound history-altering impact on every part of our shared human experience. It meant something in this world.

But a gospel wasn't just about realities in this world. It was also good news. It was news about something that had happened. You know, we can often mistakenly think of Christianity not as news, but primarily as instruction or advice, can't we?

You know, we mistakenly think that Christianity is just sort of a new moral code to follow. I think in our popular imagination, Christianity is not like reading the New York Times. It's more like reading Better Homes and Gardens, right?

It's not news. It's just some tips about how to live a better life. And this mistaken approach to Christianity, I think it goes very deep into our shared cultural memory.

Recently, I've been reading the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. You know, and in his mind, nearly every religion could be boiled down to a few core principles.

[4 : 59] That there's a God who made everything, and that there will be rewards and punishments based on your moral progress in this life. So that means for Franklin that religions are really about teaching us how to live moral and virtuous lives.

They're not really good news, but they ought to be good instruction, good advice. And Franklin was all for religion in that sense. But the truth is, while Franklin's summary is a woefully inadequate view of any religion, it misses the mark completely for the heart of Christianity.

Because it wasn't merely good advice or good instruction that Christians proclaimed. It was good news. It was like a victory report from the front lines that brought hope and joy, because something had happened that changed history and had the power to change our lives if we let it.

So what was this news? Why was the death and resurrection of Jesus good news? Well, the passage in Luke 24 that we just read shows us.

When Jesus appears to his disciples on this first night after the resurrection, we see just why his resurrection is gospel good news.

[6 : 25] And there are two things here that I want us to see. The first has to do with our material world. And the second has to do with our moral world.

In other words, the resurrection of Jesus is good news for our material world, for our broken creation. And it's also good news for our moral world, for broken creatures.

So let's consider those two things. Consider first that if the resurrection of Jesus is true, then it means that the broken material creation is being and will be mended.

The broken material creation will be mended. We see this in the first paragraph of our passage, verses 36 through 43. The risen Jesus comes among his disciples and says, Peace to you.

And then Luke writes, They were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. Well, I think that's a pretty reasonable response. Don't you? I mean, after all, here's something that people in the first century believed that sounds very modern to us.

[7 : 32] Everyone in the first century believed that dead people stay dead. Right? Just like us. Dead people stay dead. Especially after crucifixion, which was a terrible way to die.

And especially after being in a tomb for a couple of days. So we mustn't think that belief in the resurrection just sort of cropped up because first century people were superstitious or pre-scientific. They had seen Jesus killed and he was dead. And that was the end of the story. But now, here was Jesus in front of them. And how would they account for it?

Perhaps, they thought, it's an apparition. It's a spirit. But notice how adamant Jesus is to demonstrate that he is before them bodily.

It's not a spiritual experience they're having. He's there in the flesh, in his body. See my hands and my feet.

[8 : 31] Touch me. I'm flesh and bones. And then he says, do you have anything to eat? And he takes the broiled fish that they hand him and he eats it before them.

That's a wonderful kind of earthy scene, isn't it? It's so earthy that it just sort of has this ring of truth about it. In other words, it's hard to believe the disciples making up a story like this.

I mean, if I were making up a story, right, about someone conquering death and overcoming the grave, I don't think I'd have it run like this, would you? There he stood in our midst.

We were scared out of our minds. He showed us his hands and feet, his flesh and blood. And then, oh, then, he ate some lunch. I mean, talk about an anticlimax, right?

But if it is true, perhaps this risen body of Jesus is more important and wonderful than we realize.

[9 : 36] Why is the risen Jesus so adamant that they know that he's been raised in the flesh? Well, think about the last time they saw Jesus' body.

He was hanging a few feet above the ground, arms splayed, nailed to an implement of imperial torture, a cross. And his body had been wounded and torn and bruised and pierced.

There was the one that they had begun to put their hope in. There was the one they thought was their king, and perhaps even more than a king. But as they saw him crucified, how could any of those things be true?

He was beaten and torn, his body broken, never to be mended. And yet now, now here he was before them, whole, mended.

And it would take time for them to realize the full meaning. But don't you see? If in Jesus God took human flesh, then that means the creator willingly became a part of his material creation.

[10:56] Though it was broken and full of pain, God didn't reject it or abandoned it. Instead, he entered into it. And on the cross, he endured the worst that the material world could endure.

Suffering, pain, brokenness. The broken body of Jesus that went into the tomb was the creator's solidarity with the brokenness of the whole fabric of the material world.

Every grief that you and I feel, all the decay, all the death, all the loss, Jesus Christ willingly became one with the whole story of the broken and groaning material world.

So don't you see what wondrous love this God has for you and me? But that wasn't the end of the story. When Jesus emerged from the tomb on Easter in the same body that was torn, it meant a new direction for all creation.

You see, the God who made all things and in solidarity suffered with all things was now making all things new.

[12:12] The healing of the material world began on Easter Sunday. God was righting the wrong and mending his broken world from the inside out.

But of course, right, we rightly ask, where is this healing today? There's still brokenness.

There's still injustice. Still creation is groaning. And yes, God's healing, mending work is not yet fully complete.

But because of Jesus' resurrection, we know it will be. How so? Well, how do you know that spring is coming?

Yeah? Well, the days get a little longer. The weather gets a little warmer. Unless you live here in New England, then it's always cold and it's always dark.

[13:13] And we live in utter despair. But then one day as you're walking along, you see something utterly out of place.

Where once there was only withered grass and dirt, a flower has pushed through to the sky. A crocus pushes through a sign that winter's cold will be broken and a new season is coming.

And how do you feel in that moment? What do you feel? Hope. Hope.

Now, friends, if we feel that way because a flower pushed through the dirt, how much more can we live in hope knowing that in Jesus, God has taken our material creation into himself, suffered its deepest pain, and broken through death into resurrection life.

The mending has begun and it cannot be turned back. And do you know what this means? It means that the human longing, the human longing for justice is not a mere wish, dream, or a cruel joke.

[14:41] Our hearts cry for the world to be put right, to be mended, to be restored. That hard cry is not just a mirage. You see, I think when humans long for justice, what we want, what we really want, is more than just for people to be treated fairly, although that's certainly part of it.

I think what we yearn for is what the Bible calls not merely justice, but shalom, peace, the fabric of the world repaired, and the world made right and whole.

What is it that sustains you? What is it that sustains you to keep longing and keep working for that sort of healing?

Do you have an anchor? Do you have an anchor that supports you through disappointment, through setback, through failure? What will be your ballast when the brokenness seems to have the upper hand, when the dark winter of injustice seems to be never ending?

What will be your anchor and your ballast? For Christians, we have an anchor. There is a ballast.

[16:08] There is a sturdy hope. The resurrection of Jesus, the body of our Lord, mended, promising that all of creation will not be abandoned to the gay, but one day healed.

Do you have that kind of ballast in your life? But the resurrection of Jesus wasn't just good news, isn't just good news, for a broken creation.

It's also good news for broken creatures. What this passage of Luke is showing us is that if the resurrection of Jesus is true, it means not just that the broken material creation will be mended, it also means that broken moral creatures, broken moral creatures can be forgiven.

Look at what Jesus says in the next paragraph of our passage, starting in verse 46. And he said to them, thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning

from Jerusalem.

Because Jesus died and rose again, there is forgiveness of sins. And according to Jesus, nearly all of Scripture pointed to him in this way.

[17 : 31] That's what he says in the verses leading up to what I just read. Nearly all of Scripture pointed to this central fact. Think about it. In the law of Moses, the rock was struck and water poured out.

A Passover lamb was slain and the people escaped slavery. In the prophets, the return from exile was foretold because a coming king would in a mysterious way bear the sins of the people. And in the Psalms, we hear the psalmist cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? But then we also hear the psalmist say, you will not abandon my soul to the grave or let your Holy One see corruption.

These threads, these tunes, this symphony of the Old Testament resonates with the recurring theme again and again that sinners will be reconciled at a great cost and that cost will be borne by another.

But who will bear it? Who will bear the cost? A lamb? A servant? No. No. The king will.

[18 : 55] God will bear it for his people. God will divest himself of glory and stand in the place of sinners. The offended one will take the offense so that the offenders can be forgiven.

Do you see what was happening at the cross? The true rock was being struck.

The true lamb was slain. The true king cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

What was it that was happening there?

Well, an innocent one was being condemned as a criminal, right? But why? Because he stood there in our place. It wasn't just the suffering of material creation he took upon himself at the cross, but it was the just sentence of our failed moral record.

The judge of all was judged in our place. But in the resurrection, in the resurrection, a new verdict was cast.

[20 : 14] If at the cross Jesus was condemned, in the resurrection he was vindicated, he was justified, he was pronounced innocent. But that new verdict that overturned the old verdict, that new verdict wasn't just for himself.

If he died for us, he also rose for us. In his death, we see our sins and all their horror.

But in his resurrection, we see our forgiveness and our healing and our acceptance in all of its beauty. So the risen Jesus stands among his disciples and he says, peace to you.

Peace to you. And the forgiveness of sins can now be announced to all people everywhere starting right here in Jerusalem, he says.

But it won't stop there. This forgiveness is for not just Jerusalem, but for Judea and for Samaria.

And then the gospel will advance. It's for India and it's for Ethiopia and then it will keep going.

[21 : 23] It's for Rome and it's for Shanghai and then it will keep going. It's for New Zealand and it's for New Haven. The forgiveness of sins is for you, friends.

Now I wonder, is the forgiveness of sins a practical matter for you? Of course, if there is a God who created us, then a reconciled relationship with our Creator seems fairly practical, I think.

But if you're struggling with that, think about it this way. You know, in this life, you are certain to have broken relationships with fellow humans.

As human beings, the one thing, tragically, we seem really good at is hurting and offending one another. And of course, we're told we must forgive.

We have to forgive. It's the only way to release the bitterness and the pain. It's the only way to stop the cycle of violence. We have to forgive each other. But how? How will you forgive those who've wronged you?

[22 : 32] How will you release the bitterness and pain that eats you up inside? Or must you carry it all your days like a weight that drags against your soul?

How will you do it? Friends, try as we may. The reality is only those who've been forgiven have the power to turn and forgive.

When you see the weight of your wrongs and failings borne by Jesus, when you see that His resurrection is the real verdict over your life that you've been released of your great and many wrongs, only then can you turn to those who've wronged you and do the unthinkable.

Only then can you too forgive. How many friendships, how many marriages, how many wars and conflicts could be healed if we knew this power?

If this power was ours that only the resurrection of Jesus can bring? And friends, this is a power held out to you. And so, the resurrection of Jesus is good news.

[23 : 59] It's good news for this world, not just some corner of our lives we call spiritual or religious. It's good news for our material lives and our moral lives. It's good news of justice. It's good news of reconciliation.

It's the good news from the front lines that the decisive victory has been won and now we're called to order our entire lives around it. To take this truth into our hearts and our lives, to receive it with what the Bible calls belief and to order our whole lives around it.

And that reordering is what Jesus means by the word repentance. repentance. In verse 45. Now, of all the words, that one sounds like a religious word, right?

Come on. Repentance. But it simply means to change your mind. To change your mind and to live your life in light of the good news.

I remember hearing a story of World War II about a Japanese soldier stationed on a remote island in the Philippines, I think in like 1944 or something, as the war was kind of grinding on in the Pacific.

[25 : 06] But when the war had come to an end in 1945, this soldier apparently kept fighting. At first, he hadn't heard the news, but then search parties actually did reach him, but they couldn't convince him that the battle had ended.

One article I read said that they actually carried photos from his family members to him, but he thought that they were fakes because his hometown during the war had been bombed and rebuilt and the buildings and the images didn't match his memories.

So he couldn't be convinced. So for 30 years, apparently, he held out continuing to wage war on his little island despite all the messages he had received. Imagine if this lonely soldier had just believed the news.

He could have come home. He could have been reunited with his family. He could have been part of rebuilding his life and his country. I wonder, what do you make of this good news of Jesus' resurrection?

Perhaps you're not ready to fully embrace it and order your life around him as Lord. And that's understandable if you're new to Christianity or still trying to figure out what you believe about Jesus. But, you know, what is on offer in the resurrection of Jesus is so great.

[26 : 25] The news is so good that you can't just sort of forget about it. You have to look into it. You have to look into what this passage calls the witnesses. Jesus says to his disciples in 48, you're witnesses of these things.

The best thing you can do is to consider these witnesses for yourself. Take up a book like the Gospel of Luke or the Gospel of Mark and read it.

Consider this good news for yourself. And if you do, it's good to keep in mind a few things about these witnesses. Consider the date of these witnesses.

Most of the New Testament was written only a few decades after the events that they describe. Historically, that's incredibly close to the events themselves. Certainly not enough time for sort of legends to grow in the telling.

And consider not just the date of those witnesses, but consider the character of the witnesses. As you read, do they seem to be spinning a tale for power or prestige? Historically, we know that nearly all of them died as martyrs for their testimony to Jesus.

[27 : 38] They had very little to gain, earthly speaking. Their character seems trustworthy. But finally, consider not just the date or the character of the witnesses, consider also the power, the impact that they had.

Kenneth Scott Lotzerey was a church historian at Yale in the first half of the 20th century, and he wrote this in one of his works on Christianity. He said, why did Christianity succeed despite getting more severe opposition than any other religion?

Why did Christianity succeed though it had no influential backers in high places but consisted mainly of the poor and slaves? How did Christianity succeed so completely that it forced the most powerful state in history to come to terms with it and then outlive the very empire that sought to uproot it?

It is clear that at the very beginning of Christianity, there must have occurred a vast release of energy perhaps unequaled in our history.

How does a failed messianic movement in first century Palestine change the world? How do you explain that unprecedented impact?

[28 : 55] But you know, as you consider these witnesses, it would be helpful to consider your own beliefs too. You know, don't just put the message of the resurrection to the test, put your own beliefs to the test. What resources do you pull from to work for justice when the setbacks and failures seem insurmountable?

What resources do you pull from to practice forgiveness when you've been hurt or wronged? Is there anything in your worldview to empower you to live the way the resurrection of Jesus could empower you to live?

And if not, why do you keep on holding on to your worldview? Why do you remain on the island fighting a long forgotten war when the victory has been won and the new creation is underway? Give your life to Him. Hear Him say, peace to you, your sins are forgiven. Now go and live as an agent of the new creation right here in the midst of the old until the great day comes when the glory of God covers the earth like the waters cover the sea and God makes all things new.

Let's pray together. Father, we pray first a prayer of great rejoicing and thanksgiving.

[30 : 22] that Christ is raised and the great hope that we have not just for the life to come but the great hope and strength it gives us for living our lives now.

Father, we ask that you would grant faith to those who have been wrestling with the claims of Christ. Let them surrender to His beauty and to know your peace. Father, grant courage to those whose hearts are drawn to consider these things more deeply Lord, help them to follow through with the curiosity and the desire to explore these things more fully.

And for those who believe in you, grant us renewed hope that life in your resurrected kingdom is life abundant. Make us a people who rejoice in hope and who live as people of hope loving and forgiving.

to the praise of your name, Jesus. Amen.