

Easter Sunday - Raised with Christ

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Preacher: John Winter

[0 : 00] Okay, I'm looking this morning, no surprise, at the theme of the resurrection. And as you can see on the screen, the title of my address today is Raised with Christ.

And we're reading from Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 to 4. So next slide, please. Since then you have been raised with Christ.

Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory.

Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of His Word. So next slide, please. The big news which we celebrate on Easter Sunday is that Jesus is risen.

[1 : 02] And no matter how we say that, and how antithetical it becomes, it can never be as wonderful as the reality of what that means for believers in Jesus, and for the whole human race throughout human history.

It can never kind of capture the impact of what the resurrection of Jesus means for the world. From the excitement of the garden to the sudden appearance of Jesus in the upper room, with His familiar voice announcing, Peace be with you.

From that moment on, countless billions of people have put their faith and trust in the crucified and risen Christ.

And it quite literally changed human history. That's undoubtedly true. From every way you look at it, from a historical perspective, there has been no greater impact on the world than the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ.

And when He appeared to His disciples and said, Peace be with you, He showed them both His hands and His side. And you'll remember perhaps the story of Thomas, who unfortunately gets called Doubting Thomas, because he quite understandably said, I'm not going to believe this unless I actually touch the nail prints in His hand and in His feet and put my hand into His side where the spear had pierced to show that he had a broken heart.

[2 : 37] And when Thomas did that, you remember he said, My Lord and my God, as he fell down and worshipped Jesus. Now these are not incidental lines in the story.

These are very important facts. You see, our belief in the resurrection is not merely an article of faith. It's certainly not mythological. It's not kind of just a nice story to tell us that there may be some kind of life after death.

The Bible presents these things as facts. They actually physically touched the person who they had seen brutally crucified and buried in a tomb, and not only buried, but of course put into grave clothes and embalmed with spices and all of that.

They actually physically touched and handled that one who was dead, who rose to life again, without any other wounds on his body or any disabilities apart from the scars in his hand, in his feet, and his side, which stand as a memorial to the fact that he died for me.

That Christ crucified, died for my sins, and rose again for my justification. These are historical facts. The empty tomb being, demanding as it does, an explanation which no explanation will account for apart from the resurrection.

[4 : 10] The empty tomb that was first seen by the women who came and bore witness so that the men doubted because in the Jewish tradition, women were not credible witnesses.

They were regarded, Josephus says, as historical and prone to, hysterical rather, and not historical, hysterical and prone to levity, and therefore were not reliable witnesses.

And yet, the gospel narrative tells us that at least six women independently verified the bodily resurrection of Jesus. And Paul says, 500 of the brethren saw the resurrected Jesus at different times.

500 of the brethren. These are facts. But of course, these are facts that need to be believed. And we read that some believed immediately.

Like the women, they believed immediately. John, as he ran to the tomb, believed immediately. But there were others who questioned, who doubted, who reserved judgment on these events.

[5 : 22] And that was entirely understandable. So my favorite account of the resurrection is the disciples on the Emmaus Road as they're walking away from Jerusalem, despondent, talking to each other and saying, we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel.

But now, all of their hopes are dashed. And then, along comes Jesus. He draws near to them and he begins to speak to them. But they don't recognize him out of grief.

But also, they're prevented from seeing him for a while. And then, they go into a house and he breaks bread before them. And their eyes are opened. And they said, were not our hearts strangely warmed as he talked to us along the way?

The eyes of their faith were opened. And that's the point of today, really. You see, we can learn the facts. We can study the history.

We can look at all of the credible, historical details in the Gospels to try and prove the resurrection to the satisfaction of skeptics. But ultimately, the eyes of our hearts must be opened.

[6 : 29] To believe it, we must have the eyes of faith. Jesus must draw near to us and our eyes must be opened and our hearts warmed as he speaks to us.

And you know, when you came here this morning and when you listened to the singing and when you were moved by the singing and when you observed those singers at the front and you saw the joy on their faces and that of the musicians, these are people who know what it is to have the eyes of their understanding open and to have their hearts warmed by this truth.

Jesus is risen. Hallelujah. And he is risen in our hearts. But of course, there have always been some who do not believe.

Like many of the religious leaders who concocted the story about the disciples coming tonight and stealing the body and then they try to, of course, prevent the Gospel spreading.

But of course, they patently failed to produce a body. And their conspiracy theory had to get past the incompetence of a very professional Roman cohort who were on guard who would pay with their lives if one of their prisoners, in this case, the dead prisoner, should escape.

[7 : 45] So that is simply not a credible response, is it? But there were people who were determined not to believe and if you're determined not to believe, God will respect your decision.

That is a decision all of us must make. But it represents us all today, doesn't it? There will be some here who believe, some who doubt, some who reject it. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be open today as you learn something of its truth.

Next slide, please. The former bishop of Durham, that's too small for you to say, but he talks about the good news of Easter and he says, the resurrection completes the inauguration of God's kingdom.

It is the decisive event demonstrating that God's kingdom really has been launched on earth as it is in heaven. The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you're now invited to belong to it.

Our task in the present is to live as resurrection people in between Easter and the final day with our Christian life, corporate and individual in both worship and mission as a sign of the first and a foretaste of the second.

[9 : 04] Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven, but to colonize earth with the life of heaven.

It's a wonderful quote. We are resurrection people and we are called to live in resurrection power, which is why, of course, I read that passage in Colossians chapter 3.

We have been raised with Christ and we are to set our eyes, set our hearts, set our desires and our hopes upon the risen Christ who is coming again to completely transform this old earth into a world that is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

He is working out his purposes to bring about the end of this present evil age and to establish forever the kingdom of God among people.

And in the meantime, he's invading this world by putting in his subversive counter-agents who in the midst of the world are seeking to transform it through the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven.

[10:22] So I want us to think about the impact of the resurrection. Next slide, please. The impact of the resurrection for the world. In 2015, there was a very interesting debate between N.T. Wright, who you've just seen, the Bishop Durham, and Tom Holland, who is a leading historian in this country and an ancient historian indeed.

So he is well versed in all of these stories relating to the gospel, but also all of the various teachings and philosophies of the ancient world.

He wrote a book called *Dominion, The Making of the Western Mind*. And this is what he says in 2015. He says, I was more than ready to accept their interpretation of history that the triumph of Christianity had ushered in an age of superstition and credulity.

And that modernity was founded on the dusting down of long-forgotten classical values. But then, reflection on the evidence, next slide, please, changed his mind.

And in 2016, in an article for the *New Statesman*, he said, in my morals and ethics, I have learned to accept that I am not a Greek or a Roman at all, but thoroughly and proudly Christian.

[11:45] Now, this was quite a statement to make in the *New Statesman* and a lot of people were shocked. How could any learned historian take such a view? Now, at that time, he was merely a cultural Christian.

He was saying simply, I realize that the morality I have, my idea of what is right and wrong, it comes from Christianity. He knows ancient Roman history and ancient Greek history to know it doesn't come from the gods of Rome or the gods of Greece.

It comes from Christ and the establishment of Christianity in Western culture. After extensive study, he concluded that they grew out of Christianity and that most people are oblivious to the way in which the West Christian heritage has shaped modern education, healthcare, music, art, literature, and the scientific revolution, to name but a few.

at that time, didn't believe in the historical crucifixion or resurrection of Christ but since then, in 2021, he is now decidedly a Christian believer.

Christianity is the most enduring and influential legacy of the ancient world and its emergence, the single most transformative development in Western history.

[13:10] Now, why do I tell you that? I tell you that because some people rather arrogantly believe that to believe in the crucifixion or resurrection is somehow to surrender your academic credentials and to be regarded as a simpleton.

But it's simply not the case. To believe in the historical crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is to believe something very credible. It is to put your trust into something, yes, that is impossible but not impossible with God.

We know, as the Roman soldiers know, that dead people don't rise again but that's the whole point. This person who rose again is not like any other person.

He is the Son of God. He is the Savior of the world. He went to the cross to die for your sins and he rose again so that you might be right with God. It was a miracle. And in that miracle he is telling us that if we believe in him those kinds of miracles will happen to us again one day because I live, he says, you will live also just as the grave gave me up one day in the future when he comes again the grave is going to give us all up and we must stand and appear before the judgment seat of Christ. But Tom Holland is telling us something really important here. These are facts that change the world. There is no part of the world that has not been impacted by these facts and the church is growing and growing and growing because of the resurrection of Christ.

[14:49] Because he lives the whole world is impacted. Next slide please. But also the practical application of the resurrection for Christians. Remember our reading from Colossians chapter 3.

Since then you have been raised with Christ set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ who is your life appears then you will also appear with him in glory. Now we don't have time to go into a detailed exposition of that passage but what Paul is saying is there are two ways to live.

You can live according to the flesh he puts it. So you can go out and get yourself drunk and you can go out and you can give yourself to unrestrained license in sexual and sensual indulgence. You can do all of these things. You can treat people abominably. You can be cruel and unkind. You can be unjust, unrighteous, unloving. You can do all of that.

[15 : 54] or you can live by the power of the resurrection with the Holy Spirit in you who will give you self-control and will give you gentleness and kindness and loveliness and transform you from the inside out.

And you do that as you set your mind on things above. As you place your attention and your focus on Jesus. It is Jesus who can transform you from the inside out because He's alive.

He's resurrected. He sits at the right hand of God and He sends the power of His Holy Spirit into your hearts to utterly transform you. So that the story of the resurrection and the songs of the resurrection are sung by us because they reflect our experience of the power of the resurrection that has transformed us.

And if you're a Christian today you know what that feels like. You have changed from the inside out and that's the power of God producing a miracle of new birth in you.

Have you experienced that? Has that been your joy? Since 1981 I have followed this Savior. When I started out on this Christian life I would never have believed that I could have kept it up.

[17 : 19] I was the old man of Colossians doing all of those things only 18 years of age having done all of those things already sadly and yet Christ in October 1981 revealed Himself to my heart.

I thought I would never be able to keep it up and look at me 61 years old still going strong and still full thank God with the joy and the power of the resurrection of Christ.

and all glory to Him and then next slide please next one so the good news of the resurrection is available to us all today it impacted the world it impacted the lives of Christian believers like myself but the good news is it can impact your life as well that you can know the power of the resurrection in your life let me tell you what Jesus offers you today next slide please He offers you Himself as Savior who can never die again Romans 6 9 says for we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again Jesus says if you will follow me you will never ultimately die I am the resurrection of the life he who believes in me even though he dies physically will never die spiritually the one who lives and believes in me will never die then he asks the question do you believe this is this your hope when they lay you down in the grave or when your body is burned at the crematorium are you still alive in the presence of Jesus for to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord secondly

Jesus offers us the opportunity power and gift of repentance to believe Acts 5 31 the God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree God exalted him at his right hand as prince and saviour to give repentance to Israel you say well it's very hard to believe this you know pastor very hard to believe well it is hard to believe indeed it takes a miracle of new birth but Jesus said to Nicodemus you must be born again and that doesn't mean you go into your mother's womb a second time that means the Holy Spirit enters your heart and gives you a new idea a new mind a new thought about these things your heart is stirred and you say I want to believe this and then you reach out and say Jesus help me to believe this like Thomas help me as it were to touch the wounds and fall down and say my Lord and my God and if that's your heart he will grant you the faith to believe it and then thirdly he offers us a supernatural new birth

I've just spoken about that a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead fourthly he offers us forgiveness of sins for if Christ has not been raised Paul said you are of all men we are of all men most miserable and you are still in your sins but because he lives because death has been defeated because he broke out of that empty tomb there is forgiveness of sins and fifthly he offers us the guarantee our own guarantee of our resurrection from the dead 2 Corinthians 4 verse 14 we know that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence and then sixthly he guarantees that there will be no condemnation for us on judgment day no condemnation when we rise again and we stand before Jesus we will be set free we will be absolved we will be declared not guilty because Jesus died for us and rose again next slide please

[21 : 41] Ari Torri said when Jesus died he died as my representative and I died in him when he rose he rose as my representative and I rose in him when he ascended as my representative I ascended in him and today I am seated in Christ with God in the heavenlies I look at the cross of Christ and I know that atonement has been made for my sins I look at the open sepulchre and the

risen and ascended Lord and I know the atonement has been accepted there no longer remains a single sin on me no matter how many or how great my sins have been and then seventhly he offers to pour out on us his Holy Spirit this Jesus God raised up says the Acts of the Apostles and of that we are all witnesses being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit he has poured out this which you see and hear and if you think this preacher is rather excitable and rather passionate it is because this preacher knows what it is to have the Holy Spirit in his heart and this preacher knows the truth and the reality of this because God's spirit within witnesses with our spirits that we are children of God poured out on us by the resurrection and then lastly he offers us his daily presence and protection because he's alive he says

Lord I am with you always even to the end of the age and that's why you'll hear us Christians talking about him as if he is our friend and that is why you'll find us looking like we're talking to ourselves talking to him because he lives he lives he walks with me he talks with me along life's narrow way he lives he lives salvation to impart you ask me how I know he lives he lives within my heart Jesus is Lord over death over the grave Lord of the elements the climate the weather Lord over governments over armies and military power Lord over the economy and industry and business Lord Lord over science and education Lord over the media and the arts Lord of everything Lord of all Lord of my life Lord of my death Lord of all my hopes and the one in whom I will one day bow the knee before whom I will say my Lord and my God but my question as I close is this is he your Lord and your God and I want to end by quoting a poem from Amy Johnson Flint we Mike talked about her last week she wrote a hymn that he mentioned but she writes something really pertinent as we reflect on what we've heard this morning some of us stay at the cross she said some of us wait at the tomb quickened and raised with Christ yet lingering still in the gloom some of us bide at the Passover feast with Pentecost all unknown the triumphs of grace in the heavenly place that our Lord has made his own if the Christ who died had stopped at the cross his work had been incomplete if the Christ who was buried and stayed in the tomb he had only known defeat but the way of the cross never stops at the cross and the way of the tomb leads on to victorious grace in the heavenly place where the risen

Lord has gone and my question is will you follow on to be with the risen Lord in glory it is your choice and I pray that today the eyes of your heart will be opened that you might be truly able to say Jesus is risen and risen in my heart amen amen amen amen amen amen
amen! amen amen