

## **FBC Easter Service April 9 2023- Luke 24:1-12; I Cor.15:1-20 Then Came the Morning**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central fact of the Christian faith. One commentator summarized it this way:

Christianity does not hold the resurrection to be one among many tenets of belief. **Without belief in the resurrection there would be no Christianity at all.**

The Christian Church would never have begun; the Jesus movement would have fizzled out like a damp squib with his execution. **Christianity stands or falls with the great truth of the resurrection.** Disprove it, and you have disposed of Christianity. I fully agree!

From our text this morning from I Corinthians 15, Paul reasons from that famous passage about the resurrection and the implications if it did not happen. Evidently some believers in Corinth were teaching that Christians would not rise from the dead when Jesus returns to the earth.

Paul answers by saying, “That’s foolish because if Christians don’t rise from the dead, what you’re really saying is that Jesus didn’t rise from the dead because those two things go together—his resurrection and ours.”

Then he says it twice: “*If Christ has not been raised.*” (I Corinthians 15:14,17) So what Paul? He states if this is not so;

**1. Our preaching is vain. (14)**

**2. We are despicable liars. (15)**

**3. Our faith is vain. (17)**

**4. We are still in our sins. (17)**

**5. Dead Christians have perished. (18)**

**6. We are to be pitied more than all men. (19)**

**Beloved, the resurrection is the central fact of our faith. Disprove it and nothing is left.**

That’s why from the very beginning, skeptics and doubters have attacked the Christian faith at this very point. Sure some deny the virgin birth and Christ’s miracles, but it’s not his death, it’s his resurrection that’s the touchstone.

In our society there are two great religious holidays—Christmas and Easter. For many Christmas is the bigger and greater season of the year.

It’s the time of year when we gather with family and friends to sing carols, decorate the tree and exchange gifts. Christmas is the climax of the whole year, but Easter? What is it to most people? For many it’s just another long weekend, another chance to get away for a few days.

Somehow we've gotten our thinking badly mixed up. **If Easter hadn't happened, Christmas would have no meaning.** If the tomb is not empty, the cradle of Jesus makes no difference. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then he really is just a misguided Jewish rabbi with delusions of grandeur.

If Easter isn't true, then Christmas is only the story of an obscure baby born in an out-of-the-way village in a forgotten land 2000 years ago. **It's Easter that gives Christmas its meaning.**

You want proof? **Did you know that in all the New Testament no major doctrinal point is ever built upon the virgin birth of Christ. Not one.** Do I believe it happened? I believe it with every fibre of my being. But it's never discussed or mentioned. In fact, two gospels don't even say anything about it.

But the resurrection? That's a different story. All through the New Testament, it comes up again and again. Read the sermons of Acts. When the first Christians preached, they didn't mention Bethlehem; they talked about the empty tomb. **They never got over the fact that on Easter Sunday when they went to the tomb, Jesus was gone.**

When we say that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, we mean something like this: Jesus truly died on Friday afternoon, and on Sunday morning he personally, bodily, physically, actually, literally rose from the dead, never to die again.

**He rose personally**—it was Jesus himself, not some substitute.

**He rose bodily**—meaning that it was his crucified body that was raised from the dead.

**He rose physically**—meaning that he wasn't a ghost or a phantom or a figment of someone's imagination. To say that he rose actually and literally means that it really happened.

**And the word "resurrection" means that he was raised immortal and incorruptible, never to die again.** During his earthly ministry, our Lord raised several people from the dead, most notably Lazarus. But those miracles were resuscitations, not true resurrections.

**Lazarus was destined to die again.** But Jesus, having once experienced death and having triumphed over it, would never die again. He was raised immortal—alive from the dead—and he still lives today. That's what we mean when we say that on the third day he rose again from the dead.

Why does this matter? **First, this is what the Bible teaches.** Let there be no confusion on this point. Everything in the gospel records, everything in the book of Acts, everything in the epistles stands in perfect harmony on this point: Jesus died and then rose from the dead.

**Second, this is what really happened.** If you had been there that Sunday morning, you would have seen the empty tomb. If you had been with the disciples, you would have seen Jesus alive from the dead. Like Thomas, you could have checked out the evidence for yourself.

**Third, this is what the church has always believed.** The resurrection of Christ has always been a fundamental truth of Christian doctrine. It's one part of that tiny handful of things that has always been believed by all Christians everywhere.

This truth unites Christians of all denominations large and small. If you do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus, you have placed yourself outside the boundaries of orthodox Christianity.

**Fourth, this is the church's message.** Read the book of Acts. Study the sermons of Peter and Paul. **The climax was not "Christ is crucified," but "Christ is risen from the dead!"**

That's the message that turned the world upside down. The Son of God had come back from the dead! Nothing like that had ever happened before.

**We don't worship a dead Jesus. We worship a risen Christ.** That's why the cross behind me is empty. Jesus was crucified once and for all—and the cross is empty to remind us that though he died, he did not stay dead.

Sometimes well-meaning people say something like this: "Even if Christianity isn't true, it's still the best way to live."

**The proper theological term for that is Baloney.** If it's not true, why would anyone want to believe it or live it? I don't want to spend my days deluded, following some clever fable. Life is too short to do anything but find the truth and then commit yourself to it 100%.

If Jesus did not rise on the third day, then the "Hallelujah Chorus" is just another piece of nice music. It's beautiful but it's not based on truth.

If Jesus did not rise, then our prayers are empty, our preaching is in vain, our missionary work is useless, and the church itself is in danger because it stands for something that is not true. **Funerals.**

When those ladies who first came to embalm the body of Jesus and found the tomb empty, they rushed back to the Jesus' disciples with the news. And guess what. They were told they were talking nonsense.

If Jesus is still in the grave, then we're just talking nonsense on Easter Sunday morning. That's what Paul meant here in this great passage —and he's right!

**It all hangs on that little word "if." If Jesus did not rise.**

But Paul triumphantly asserts the positive truth in verse 20: *"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."*

We can simply reverse all of Paul's previous points. **Now that Christ is risen ...**

**A) Our faith has meaning.**

**B) We have forgiveness.**

**C) We will see our loved ones who died in Christ.**

**D) We can be certain about our own future.**

**What wonderful news this is. Now there is hope for the hopeless.** Now light shines from heaven to the darkest corners of the world. Now we can say to anyone, “If you come to Christ, he will not turn you away.” No one is beyond the reach of God’s grace.

Whatever “your” sin might be, no matter where you’ve been or what you’ve done, Jesus can forgive you and wash you clean in one great moment of transformation. Heaven now becomes real and death has lost its victory.

**We still die—but we don’t stay dead forever.** There is good news from the graveyard because Jesus has come back from the dead.

If he did rise from the dead, then we’re going to be okay. We can have our doubts and our worries and fears, and even as we drive away from the funeral, we can have many unanswered questions.

But that’s not what matters. **Our faith is not determined by our doubts.** Our faith rests on what happened in the Garden Tomb outside Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.

**If you ever arrive at a place where all your doubts are gone, you will know that you’re in heaven.**

Because Jesus rose from the dead, then we’re on the winning side. Death has had a field day for a long time. Lots of people go into the cemeteries—no one comes out.

**No one, that is, except Jesus.** I’ve staked my entire future and all I believe on this truth—that my Lord lives today because he conquered death on Easter Sunday morning.

As the classic Gaither hymn says, “an empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives.”

**Thanks be to God for the empty tomb.** As much as I am in awe of the virgin birth of Jesus, as much as I wonder at his sinless life, as much as I glory in the cross of Jesus, it’s the resurrection of Jesus that makes Christianity unique among all of the world religions.

Go to the tombs of the founders of the great world religions and call the roll:

Mohammed ... .. “Here”

Buddha ... .. "Here”

Confucius ... .. "Here”

Moses ... .. “Here”

Jesus Christ ... ..

**No answer ... Because he’s not there. The tomb is empty!!!** Doubt if you will, but the tomb is still empty because he’s not there. He’s risen, just as he said. This is the heart of what we are all about.

*“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” (I Cor:5:19)*