

Intro: He Is Risen – Hope Is Alive

Imagine visiting a grave today... and finding it empty. Not disturbed. Just empty.

That's where Christianity begins, not with an idea, **but with an empty tomb.**

In our society, there are two great religious holidays each year, Christmas and Easter. For most of us, Christmas is the bigger and greater season of the year. It's the time when we gather with family and friends.

We sing, we celebrate, we laugh, and we exchange presents. Christmas is the climax of the whole year. **And Easter?** For most people it's just another long weekend, a break in the long stretch between Christmas and summer vacation.

Somehow, we've gotten our thinking badly mixed up.

If Easter had not happened, Christmas would have no meaning.

If Easter had not happened, Christmas would be nothing more than a sweet-sounding fable.

If Easter had not happened, Christmas would be nothing more than a beautiful story about a baby in a manger. **But because of Easter, we know who that baby really was, the risen Son of God.**

It's the great miracle of Easter that gives Christmas its true meaning.

Dr. Billy Graham once told Time magazine, "If I were an enemy of Christianity, I would aim right at the Resurrection, because that is the heart of Christianity."

The Thomas Jefferson Bible removes all mention of the supernatural, including the miracles of Christ, the Virgin Birth, and the Resurrection. **For example:**

"Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.

There laid they Jesus and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed." **That's it.** The end. He died and they buried him. **No mention of the Resurrection.**

Even some professing Christians say it doesn't matter. **Bricklayer E.G.**

What does verse 12 state: *"if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."*

What Does It Mean?

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, 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 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. **Lazarus though 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?

It matters because this is what the Bible teaches. Let there be no confusion on this point. Everything in the book of Acts, everything in the epistles stands in perfect harmony on this point:

The powerful message preached by the apostles was Christ crucified and Christ risen.

This is the cornerstone message of the Christian church. The resurrection of Christ has always been the fundamental foundational truth of the Christian faith.

Read the book of Acts. Study the sermons of Peter and Paul. The highpoint was not **"Christ is crucified,"** but **"Christ is risen from the dead!"** That's the message that turned the world upside down.

And it's our message also here at First Baptist. **Let it always be so.**

That's why the cross in the sanctuary is empty to remind us that though Jesus died, he did not stay dead. We worship a risen Christ

This truth unites Christians of all denominations large and small.

What If It Didn't Happen? 11 Corinthians 15:12

In the early church some believers became confused when their loved ones died and were buried.

Evidently a belief spread that Christians who had died would not be raised from the dead.

Paul addresses this problem in I Corinthians 15 by reminding his readers that the resurrection of believers depends on whether or not Jesus himself rose from the dead.

"But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

Paul does not rebuke the Corinthians for their fears and doubts, nor does he try to “**prove**” the resurrection of the dead in some detailed argument.

He points these erring believers back to the empty tomb and says, “Remember that God raised his Son. Everything hinges on that.”

Then for a few verses, he plays devil’s advocate with them and argues the “**what if**” contrary case.

What if Jesus has not been raised from the dead? **What then? Four conclusions follow.**

If Christ is not risen... our faith is empty. Verse 17

If Christ is not risen... our sins are unforgiven.

If Christ is not risen...death has the final word.

If Christ is not risen...we are the most pitiful people on earth.

Our faith is futile:

He says this explicitly in verse 17. *“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.”*

The word futile means “useless, empty, vain, of no value.” **The Christian faith without the Resurrection is an exercise in futility.** If Jesus did not rise from the dead, it’s not true and we are wasting our time believing it.

If Christ is not risen from the dead, then the Christian faith collapses like a deck of cards.

We are still in our sins: verse 17. *“you are still in your sins.”*

Christ’s death cannot save us if he is still in the tomb. I read an account of a man praying like this: “Lord Jesus, even if you didn’t rise from the dead, at least we know our sins are forgiven.”

I ask you my brothers and sisters. Is that what Paul is saying here? I think not!

What I see clearly from the text is there is no forgiveness and we are eternally lost if Christ is still in the tomb.

We will never see our loved ones again: I Corinthians 15:18

“Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.”

Death has won the final battle if Christ did not rise. Then our worst fears are realized as we lay our loved ones to rest, knowing that we will never see them again.

We should be pitied: I Corinthians 15:19

“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men”

Sometimes well-meaning people say something like this: **I’m sure you’ve heard it.** “Even if Christianity isn’t true, it’s still the best way to live.”

Paul would say that kind of thinking completely misses the truth.

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 a danger because it stands for something that is not true.

If Jesus is still in the grave, then we're just talking nonsense on Easter Sunday morning. That's what Paul meant with his devil's advocate discourse —and he's right!

What Difference Does It Make? I Corinthians 15:20

Having stated the negative, Paul now triumphantly asserts the positive truth in verse 20:

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

Here is the reversal of all Paul's previous points. Now that Christ is risen ...

Cowards became bold.

Doubters became preachers.

A frightened group of disciples became a movement that changed the world.

Something happened—and the only explanation is: **Jesus is alive, and because he's alive,**

Our faith has meaning.

We have forgiveness.

We will see our loved ones who died in Christ.

We can be certain about our own future.

What wonderful news this is. Now there is hope for the hopeless.

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, the blood of Jesus Christ 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. Because he lives, we shall live also.

Empty Tomb That's the good news from the graveyard - Jesus' tomb is empty.

Over my lifetime, I have taken more funeral services than I can remember.

It never gets any easier. I see the finality of leaving precious loved ones in the ground and witness their grief of leaving a good man or woman in the grave.

And if God spares me, I will likely see more before my time on earth is done. **The bodies of everyone I've ever buried are still in the grave.**

But this I believe with all my heart, that the believer who closes his eyes in death, opens them again in glory, absent from the body and present with the Lord. **I know and believe that simply by faith.**

O how I thank God that believers can find such hope in the face of death?

This morning I want to lay all my cards on the table so you my brothers and sisters will clearly know what your pastor believes and will preach as long as he has breath.

A long time ago I decided to go **“all in”** on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I've taken my stand by the empty tomb.

I've thrown my cards on the table for all the world to see, and I'm not ashamed to stand with Christians across the centuries and say, “I believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.”

I'm “all in” on the Resurrection of 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. **I invite you to do the same thing.**

We marvel and wonder at the virgin birth of Jesus and his sinless life. We glory in his cross. But it's the resurrection of Jesus that makes Christianity unique among all of the world religions.

If you were to go to the tombs of the founders of the great world religions and call the roll, what would you hear?

Mohammed - “Here”

Buddha - “Here”

Confucius - “Here”

Moses - “Here”

Jesus Christ - **No answer ... because he's not there. His tomb is empty.**

Doubt if you will, but the tomb of Jesus is still empty because he's not there.

He is risen just as he said.

In the early church Christians greeted each other this way: One would say, “He is risen.” Another would answer, “He is risen indeed.”

This is Easter Sunday morning. It’s a wonderful day to make a choice. It’s a great day to stop doubting and start believing.

You know that Jesus died ... there is no doubt about that.

You know that he died for you. You know that he rose from the dead. The question God is asking you is very simple:

What have you done with my Son?

Can you say I’ve made up my mind. **I’m going “all in” on the Resurrection of Jesus.**

The empty tomb says, He is risen.

The disciples say, He is risen.

The church of Jesus Christ says, He is risen.

All creation says, He is risen.

I pray we have all gone beyond a mere profession of belief and allowed that belief to change our orientation of life?

If you have never done so I encourage you to settle this issue in your own heart.

On this happy Easter morning I declare to you that Jesus Christ is alive.

Thanks be to God for the empty tomb and a glorious risen Saviour.

Prayer: Father may those who doubt, doubt no more. May those who wonder, “Is it true?” find that all their questions are answered with the triumphant message that Jesus Christ is alive today.

Living Lord Jesus, be born anew in our hearts today. Lead us to the empty tomb. May we hear the angel’s voice declare, *“He is not here, for he is risen, as he said.”*

Grant that we might leave this place singing with Easter joy in our hearts.

Through him and to him who is the resurrection and the life, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.