

“AND THEN THE RESURRECTION CHANGED EVERYTHING”

Matthew 28:1-10

“And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died, and buried.” And if there were no more to say; if the history of Jesus Christ had ended in a garden sepulcher, where disciples came to weep, leave flowers and Hallmark sympathy cards, and commemorate the Worst Tragedy Ever Known instead of the Greatest Story Ever told—what then?

Then there would be no reason for hope. Then there would be no reason for attending church; no reason for reading the Bible; no reason for singing joyful Easter hymns like *I Know that My Redeemer Lives* or *Jesus Christ is Risen Today*, because the lyrics would be lies. But thank God, there is more to say. There is this to say: “And on the third day, He rose again from the dead.” And that resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. EVERYTHING.

This is why Scripture testifies to the fact of Christ’s resurrection so loudly, so clearly, so insistently, and in so many places—including the Old Testament. **“I know that my Redeemer lives.”** Familiar words, aren’t they? Yet, long before the hymnist wrote them, Job confessed them; and some date the Book of Job to as early as 2,000 B.C. **“I know that my Redeemer lives,”** said Job, **“and in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me,”** Job 19:25-27. Today, our hearts yearn in the same way.

The fact of the resurrection is mentioned in all four Gospels: Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20, along with the many post-resurrection appearances Jesus made over the forty days before His ascension. The fact of the resurrection is stated throughout the New Testament epistles; as in the great Resurrection Chapter of First Corinthians, where Paul wrote, **“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time,”** 1 Corinthians 15:3-6.

Paul wrote in Romans 1: **“Regarding His Son, who as to His human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”** Paul wrote in Romans 6: **“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him.”** Peter wrote: **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He**

has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” 1 Peter 1:3. Ultimately, the fact of Christ’s resurrection from the dead is referenced in twenty-four of the twenty-seven New Testament books. Why?

Everything the Bible teaches us, from the life we now live to the eternal life we will inherit—everything is predicated on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Indeed, the resurrection of Jesus is so fundamental to our Christian faith, hope, and future expectations, that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:17-20, **“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.”** And His resurrection changed everything.

Consider how the resurrection of Jesus changed the lives of His first disciples. On several occasions, Jesus forewarned His disciples of His impending suffering and death. Yet, with each warning, He gave the certain promise of His resurrection. For example, we read in Matthew 16:21, **“From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”**

Yet, despite these assurances of Jesus, how many of His disciples expected Him to rise from the dead? To my knowledge, not one. Instead, as the First Easter dawned, women hurried to the sepulcher to anoint a dead body, not to worship a living Savior. Their concern was “who will roll away the stone?” Standing outside the same sepulcher, Mary Magdalene thought she was talking with the garden caretaker, not the risen Christ. Later, Peter and John raced to the sepulcher, saw the burial linen and the neatly folded napkin that had covered Christ’s face. Yet, they equated the empty tomb with body theft, not bodily resurrection.

As the two disciples walked toward Emmaus, they were singing funeral dirges, not Easter anthems. “We thought He was the one,” they said. Thomas, who unfairly received the nickname ‘Doubting Thomas’—unfairly, because on that First Easter all the disciples of Jesus were doubters—insisted: **“Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it,”** John 20:25. At least Thomas was an honest doubter.

And it’s easy for us to fault these disciples, isn’t it? “Peter, you should have known better. John, you should have trusted more. Mary Magdalene, you should have been more hopeful. Thomas, you should not have doubted. Jesus told all of you that He would rise from the dead. Weren’t you listening? More than this, all of you saw Jesus perform miracles. You witnessed Jesus walk on water, control the weather, cast our demons, cure illnesses, feed thousands from scraps of food, even raise the dead. You

had all the pertinent facts, yet you came to all the wrong conclusions. You should be ashamed of yourselves.”

Yes, but we have the same facts, don't we? We have the same words of God. In that word of God, we've all witnessed the same miracles. Yet, are there not still times and circumstances in our own lives—fears, tears, losses, hopelessness, failures—in which we find ourselves acting more as if Jesus were still dead and buried instead of living and reigning?

You may be thinking, “That's not a fair comparison, Pastor Weis. Those first disciples saw the risen Lord; heard the risen Lord; watched the risen Lord eat and drink to prove He was not a ghost or phantom memory or group hallucination. And Thomas was permitted touch the nail-prints in Christ's hands and the spear-thrust in Christ's side. We've been given no such evidence. All we have is the testimony of Scripture.

All we have is Scripture? Friends, if that is our complaint, then shame on us. Yes, Jesus permitted Doubting Thomas to touch the nail-prints and spear-thrust. But remember what Jesus told Thomas. He said: **“Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe.”** Thomas replied, **“My Lord and My God.”** And Jesus said, **“Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed,”** John 20:27-29.

To underscore this importance of Scripture to our faith and hope, to the certainty of Christ's resurrection and our own resurrection, John wrote in the very next verses: **“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name,”** John 20:30-31.

Significantly, when the risen Jesus addressed those two disciples from Emmaus, He did not chide them for failing to recognize Him. He chided them for failing to recognize the truth of the Scriptures; the same Scriptures that you and I have in our possession. He said, **“How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?”** And then, **“beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself,”** Luke 24:25-27.

When the disciples realized that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, as He had promised, what happened? Everything changed. Fear became confidence. Sadness became laughter. Despair became hope. Because of the resurrection, the women who went to the sepulcher to anoint a dead body left rejoicing in a living Savior. Because of the resurrection, the two disciples who shuffled sadly toward Emmaus raced back to

Jerusalem to share the news: **“It is true! The Lord has risen,”** Luke 24:34. Because of the resurrection, Simon Peter, who in fear had denied knowing Jesus—not once, not twice, but three times, would on the day of Pentecost boldly proclaim Christ in the very city in which Jesus was crucified.

Or consider how the resurrection of Jesus changed the life of Mary Magdalene. Here was a woman whom Jesus had freed from demonic possession. A woman devoted to the Lord. A woman who had stood steadfastly beneath the cross of Christ when all of His male disciples, with the exception of John, had forsaken Him and fled. But when Jesus died, Mary’s hopes died with Him.

Crushed hopes. You know what that’s like, don’t you? You hoped for a better job. You hoped to retire comfortably. You hoped to finish college. You hoped to get married or hoped to have a perfect marriage. You hoped to have children. You hoped to recover from an illness. Then, bitter disappointment.

Mary Magdalene’s hopes were so crushed—imagine this, she did not realize that the two men sitting inside Christ’s empty tomb, both dressed in shining white garments, were angels. Nor did she realize that the Man suddenly standing beside her was the risen Jesus. **“Woman,”** said Jesus, **“why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”** And Mary answered, **“Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him.”** I can’t imagine a situation more hopeless than the need to find a dead Savior and return Him to His grave. Were the circumstances not so pitiful, they might be laughable; this image of Mary Magdalene struggling to get Jesus back into His sepulcher. How did she plan to do that?

And then Jesus said, **“Mary.”** One word. Just one. And in an instant, everything changed for Mary Magdalene. Her Savior was alive, and therefore so was her hope. Frankly, I can’t read this portion of Scripture without being deeply moved by that one word, that one instant, that one mention of this woman’s name: **“Mary.”** A single word that somehow contains a gentle admonition, but also an infinite amount of love, understanding, and compassion. Hasn’t the risen Lord said similar words to us? In our deepest woes and darkest hours, has He not tenderly spoken our names and said, “Why are you so worried and sad? Did you think I was still dead?”

The resurrection of Jesus changed everything about the lives of Peter, James, John, Mary Magdalene, Thomas, and all the others who encountered the risen Lord that First Easter; and afterwards, the apostle Paul, who said this about the impact of Christ’s resurrection on his own life and ministry: **“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead,”** Philippians 3:10-11.

On this Easter Sunday, consider also how the resurrection of Jesus has changed our own lives. Our lives have changed, haven't they? If we think otherwise, then we aren't really seeing the power of Christ resurrection.

How then has the resurrection of Jesus changed our lives? Much of that change is summarized by a phrase spoken repeatedly throughout the resurrection narrative—spoken by both Jesus and His angels. Can you guess that phrase? It is stated twice in today's text: **“Do not be afraid,”** verse 5; and, **“Do not be afraid,”** verse 11. A more literal rendering of these phrases is ‘do not going on being afraid’ or ‘stop being afraid.’

Afraid of what? One obvious answer is DEATH. ‘Stop being afraid of death.’ Certainly, no one wants to die. Yet, when the hour of our death comes, we have no reason to fear. Why? Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. Jesus said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though He dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die,”** John 11:25-26. And then to prove the truthfulness of His words, Jesus walked to the tomb where Lazarus had lain dead, buried, and decaying for four days, and called out in a loud voice, **“Lazarus, come out!”** And Lazarus came out. At the return of Jesus, all believers will hear the Son of God call their names in a similar way. And they will come out too. They will have glorious resurrection bodies, like Christ's glorified body. They will, as Job said, ‘see the Redeemer with their own eyes.’

Today, on Easter, we may find our thoughts turning to those loved ones we've lost: a father or mother, a husband or wife, a child; a brother, sister, friend, or fellow Christian. Yet, it is what happened on this very day so long ago that changed everything, and gives us such unshakable hope. It provides divine comfort amid grief and pain. It fills us with the certain knowledge of being with our loved ones again, and with our risen Lord.

I've conducted many funerals during my ministry. But I would never have had the strength or courage to conduct even none were it not for the resurrection of Jesus and the victory proclaimed by these words: **“ ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,”** 1 Corinthians 15:54-57.

But it isn't just a future life, a hereafter, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees us. His resurrection also gives us life in the here-and-now; a living hope, as Simon Peter described it—living hope as opposed to all the lifeless and transitory things in which we too often are tempted to hope: health, fame, fortune, connections, careers, insurance, 401k accounts. These are all destined to pass away. But the risen Jesus lives forever, as does any hope placed in Him. The same Jesus who said in John 10:10, **“I have come that they have life, and have it to the full.”**

For us, Easter is not a matter of interpretation but application. We know Jesus rose triumphantly from the grave. We know the facts. But far too often, we overlook the meaning and application—in the same way Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene misinterpreted the meaning of the empty tomb that First Easter morning. We read the Easter narrative, yet miss the way in which the resurrection of Jesus drastically changed the life, hopes, ministries, marriages, and perspectives of every disciples who heard the glad Easter message and encountered the risen Savior.

So, as we celebrate Easter today, allow me to place the Easter message, the power of the resurrection, into its everyday application: I used to fear death; but then the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. I used to grieve hopelessly for lost loved ones; but then the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. I used to hide from problems, as the disciple once hid behind the locked doors of an upper room; but then the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything.

I used to think some marriages were too troubled to save; but then the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. I used to feel so alone, but then the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. I used to wonder if all my sins were really forgiven, really atoned for; but then the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. I used to worry that God might not keep all His promises; but then the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. I used to feel hopeless because of illnesses, financial difficulties, jobs, difficulties, doubts, loved ones in a nursing facility; but then the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. This, dear friends, is what it means to apply Easter. This is what it means to say with Paul, **“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.”**

This past week, one of our Sunday School children—I won’t say who—told me in such a sweet, sincere voice: “I think Easter is the best holiday.” And I think she was right. On the third day, Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

And His resurrection has changed everything.