

CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD

1 Corinthians 15:19-26 | Resurrection of our Lord – Easter Day | April 1, 2018

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Juva Jesu

In the name of our risen and victorious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, dear brothers and sisters:

I'd like to begin with a brief video this morning. I think you'll enjoy it. [**show video**]

Can you guess the date when that video was first shown? The respected BBC show *Panorama* first aired it on April 1, 1957 – April Fool's Day. Huge numbers of people were indeed fooled. Many called the BBC wanting to know how they could grow their own spaghetti tree. The BBC had an answer: "Place a sprig of spaghetti in a tin of tomato sauce and hope for the best." Even the head of the BBC later admitted that after seeing the show he checked in an encyclopedia to find out if that was how spaghetti actually grew. The broadcast remains, by far, the most widely acclaimed April Fool's Day hoax ever.

Except perhaps for one: The empty tomb. Obviously, Easter is a hoax, right? Perhaps Jesus' disciples broke into the tomb and stole his body. That was what Jesus' enemies feared would happen. Maybe it was Jesus' twin brother who died on the cross. That sounds like an episode of *As the World Turns*. Perhaps Jesus really only fainted on the cross and the coolness of the tomb revived him. Yeah, as if the Roman soldiers suddenly forgot what a dead guy looked like.

Let me assure you: the empty tomb is no hoax. No trick. No conspiracy. No cover up. We have the eyewitness accounts of not only Jesus' disciples but even the soldiers who guarded the tomb. We have the eyewitness testimony of the women who went to the tomb and found it empty. We have the announcement of the angel who couldn't have said it more clearly: "**He has risen!**" Most importantly of all, we have the testimony of the Spirit on the pages of his Word, the God who does not lie, the God who always speaks the truth. Through Paul's pen he tells us: **CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!** What a difference this makes for us! In Adam we were dead. In Christ we are alive again. And so, because Jesus lives, we look forward to a glorious future.

I. In Adam We Were Dead

A lot of people look down on Christians. Many call us naïve, ignorant, foolish and stupid. You believe God created the world in six days? Come on! You believe Noah's ark was real? Give me a break! You believe that Jesus actually came back from the dead. Get real! Many unbelievers look at us with genuine pity in their eyes, shake their heads and think: *Oh, you poor, misguided people.*

You know what? If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, if the bones of Jesus' of Nazareth are rotting away

somewhere in the Holy Land, we are to be pitied. If Jesus is dead we are living a lie and wasting our time. If Jesus is dead I need to get a real job. If Jesus is dead you need to find something better to do on Sunday mornings. If Jesus is dead than all our sacrifices and stewardship and singing and sermonizing are for nothing. If Jesus is dead then all our hopes will die when we die. If Jesus is dead our hope is only for this life, and we are to be pitied.

Well, we Christians are not the pitiful people that many think we are. Our hope is real. And yet, in another sense we are pitiful. By nature each and every one of us is a pitiful, miserable sinner. What Paul wrote to the Ephesians speaks to us to: **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins** (2:1). Sin doesn't just weaken us a bit. Sin leaves us broken. Sin doesn't just put a smudge or two on our spiritual resumes. Sin kills. Sin destroys. Sin is a death sentence. And that sentence hangs over every soul. Our text tells us so: **In Adam all die.**

And that doesn't just mean that our bones will fill a box six feet under the ground, or an urn on someone's mantle. That means every descendant of Adam – each one of us – deserves to be cast, body and soul, into the eternal lake of fire.

II. In Christ We are Alive Again

In Adam, all die. But let's take a note from Paul Harvey and get to the rest of the story. In Adam all die, but **in Christ all will be made alive.** Our God saw us in our sinful condition. He saw that we were destined for death and hell, and he pitied

us. His pity, his mercy, his love led him to act. He sent his one and only Son to save us from certain death.

I want you to notice the word *all* again. **In Christ, all will be made alive.** Our God wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). And so Jesus came to solve sin and death for all people. He did four things to accomplish this goal: He became a man; he lived; he died; he rose. Let me take you through them one at a time.

We confess it in the Creed. Jesus was **“conceived by the Holy Spirit and born the Virgin Mary.”** Why? Not just so we can have a cute little baby Jesus in our Nativity sets. Jesus, who is true God, became man to save man. He took on human flesh to save human beings. Jesus became one of us so that he could live under God's law as our Substitute.

So how did that go? The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus was **tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin** (4:15). Jesus did exactly what God demands. God says to all of us, **“Be holy, because I the Lord your God am holy”** (Leviticus 19:2). God never says, “Just do your best. That'll be fine.” He demands perfection, a sinless life that we can never give him. Since we can't do it, Jesus did it in our place. His perfection counts as our perfection.

And after living a perfect life, the Son of God died on a cross. Again we ask: Why? Because a holy God can't just overlook sin. A holy God demands that sin be paid for. But rather than punishing us sinners

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus was the scapegoat, the whipping boy. He endured the punishment that we deserved and paid for our sins.

And on this great festival day we get to hear God's shout of approval. For that's what the empty tomb is. It's the sign, the assurance, the proof that God accepts Jesus' sinless life in our place and his holy blood as payment for our sins. The empty tomb proclaims loudly and clearly that sin is forgiven, Satan is vanquished, death is done.

Jesus' empty tomb tells us that we are not people to be pitied. Far from just having hope for this life, as believers in the risen Christ our hope is eternal. We look forward to a glorious future.

III. We Look Forward to a Glorious Future

Listen again to our text: **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** ²¹ **For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.** ²² **For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.** ²³ **But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**

I want to call your attention to the word *firstfruits*. Firstfruits is a term that God used with his chosen people, Israel. It referred to the very first crops that were harvested. They were to bring the firstfruits of the harvest to him as a thankoffering. The idea is that after the

firstfruits comes the rest of the harvest.

My friends, Jesus is the firstfruits; we are the rest of the harvest. In other words, Jesus was the first to rise from the dead. Other resurrections will now follow. Ours! Jesus gives us this promise: **Because I live, you also will live** (John 14:19). Everything that Jesus did counts for us. His perfect life counts as our perfect life. His payment for sin counts as our payment for sin. His resurrection guarantees our own.

Jesus also said this: **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die"** (John 11:25-26). Unless Jesus comes again first, all of us here today are going to die. Except not really. Those who believe in Jesus never really die. Yes, their hearts stop beating and their bodies are buried. But the soul is with Jesus. And on the Last Day the body will be raised and reunited with the soul to enjoy eternal rest. As we heard Job confess this morning: **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** (19:26-27).

Our text talks about that day: **Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.** ²⁶ **The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**

In ancient times when one king defeated another he would have him brought to his throne room so he could put his foot on

his neck. This was a clear sign: I have defeated you. I win. Jesus' mighty foot rests on the necks of sin, Satan and death. All our enemies are defeated!

And so we look forward to a glorious future, a life free from the effects of sin, an existence without struggle. No more Old Adam. No more sinful nature. No more sin at all! And so: No more broken relationships, broken hearts, broken homes, broken lives. Nothing but perfect peace and joy forever and ever and ever.

Until then we have peace in our Savior's forgiveness every day. We have purpose in life – we serve a living Savior, labor that is never in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). We have strength through faith for our daily battle against sin and Satan. This is what our risen Lord has won for us. This is why we rejoice this Easter Day!

None of you are foolish enough to go home today and try to plant a spaghetti tree. And yet you are foolish enough to believe that Jesus lives. Thank God for it! Remember: **The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom** (1 Corinthians 1:25). My friends, Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! This is no prank. This is no hoax. This is the glorious truth! Thanks be to God! Amen.

S.D.G.