

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Easter Broadcasts: Easter Message (2003)

Well, today is Easter Sunday; two days ago it was Good Friday. To many people these are welcome holidays, but little more. However, Christians attach a greater significance to these days. Maybe some who are listening to this broadcast today thought of the real meaning of Good Friday; I hope you did. The real importance of these days lies in the One to whom they point and in to what they refer. Good Friday reminds every true believer of the death of the Lord Jesus. Many would sing the old hymn, so loved and well known,

*'There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all'*

But today is Easter Sunday! It tells of the triumph of His resurrection. What will be sung in churches and places of worship today? The chorus of another hymn goes like this,

*'Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign!
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!'*

The Christian faith is based upon the wonderful fact of Christ's resurrection. Some may ridicule this and pour scorn upon the truth. They may think of it as being an impossibility, but we who have faith in Christ know better. When the Lord Jesus was here on this planet he said some striking things. On one occasion, He visited a home in the village of Bethany. There were two sisters living in this home and their brother had died. Sorrow filled their hearts. But the Saviour came into the home and uttered words that no other person could have said, *"I am the resurrection and the life"* John 11:25. As a starting point to our talk today, just think of the unique glory of the Lord Jesus; He is God. If we are assured of the fact that He broke the power of death and was raised victorious, we should not be left with any doubt as to the greatness of His Person.

The truth is **foretold** in the Old Testament. There are many references to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus there. The Psalms give us much comfort in times of trouble and sorrow. Maybe we are not so familiar with the psalms which refer to Jesus. Here is one. This is Psalm 16 and it refers to His life of dependence and trust in God. Though He was God, yet He became man and was obedient in every part of that life. At the end of this psalm we have some profound words; He speaks to God, *"For Thou wilt not leave My soul in hades; neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew Me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for ever more"* Psalm 16:10-11. How jealous God was with regard to that Holy body which had been prepared for His Son! God raised Him from the dead. In the New Testament, when the apostle Paul was preaching among the Gentiles, his message was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. On one occasion, He quoted from the very psalm we have just thought about. David was the actual writer of this psalm, although he wasn't writing about himself. Let's think of Paul's words, *"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption"* Acts 13:36. Can we be left in any doubt as to the unity of the Bible with regard to the theme of Easter Sunday? Whether in the books of Moses or the Psalms or the Prophets, the message is clear and plain. It looks onward to *"Jesus and the resurrection."*

Just think now of the life of the Lord Jesus as seen in the four Gospels. We could, of course, limit ourselves to His public service to God His Father. It was evident throughout His life that death was subject to Him. It didn't matter what the conditions were - the daughter of Jairus, the only son of the widow of Nain or even Lazarus who had been dead four days, all bowed to His voice of life-giving power. We might well ask, as did the crowd then, *"What manner of man is this?"* There were occasions when Jesus told His disciples what was going to happen to Him. Let's think of one. *"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day"* Matthew 16:21.

Somehow, the disciples never took this in; on that occasion Peter was horrified. It has surprised many that the enemies of Jesus remembered; that's why they put a seal on the tomb! All the events of His life, filled with such perfection as they were, led only to the cross of Calvary. This is not really our subject, but let's ask ourselves, 'Can we justly separate His death from His resurrection?' There could not have been one without the other. Because we are all sinners, by nature and practice, they are essential to our salvation. It was the wickedness of men that nailed Jesus to the cross; God's answer was to raise Him from the dead. Let's think then of the **fact** of His resurrection.

We are concerned, now, with the real message of Easter Sunday. To the believer, Sunday is the first day of the week. We call it the Lord's Day. It is the resurrection day! We will think now of the actual event. In each of the four Gospels it is recorded very carefully. The circumstances, though there are differences in the accounts, all focus upon this first day of the week. Let's listen to the record given in Mark's Gospel, "*And when the sabbath was past... very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?*" This was a big problem; a few women were not strong enough to move the stone. They found that it had already been rolled away! All my life I have heard the question asked, 'Did they take away the stone to let Jesus out?' The answer is an emphatic, 'No!' In one of Paul's epistles we read, "*raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father*", Romans 6:4. The stone was rolled away only so that we might look in and see the empty tomb. This is not defeat but triumph! Notice, that in the verse just read, the Sabbath is distinguished from the first day of the week. The Sabbath was the day of rest to a godly Jew; it was the seventh day. The first day is the Christian's day, a new beginning!! It is only Mark who informs us that it was at the rising of the sun, seeming to add to the truth of a new day.

Each of the four evangelists have given their accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. They didn't see it happen but they were all eye-witnesses of the risen Saviour. Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. Listen to these words. Speaking of himself and the other apostles, Luke writes, "*To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*" Acts 1:3. It has been said that there is no incident which has been so **well proven** than the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It must be so; Christianity either stands or falls by this truth. The apostle Paul adds his contribution to the infallible proofs in 1 Corinthians 15. He tells us that Jesus was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. Then He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. Finally, Paul says '*He was seen of me.*' Luke tells us in his Gospel that He appeared to two of them on their way home from Jerusalem to Emmaus and was made known to them in the breaking of bread. He ate and drank with His disciples and when they thought it was a spirit, He invited them to handle Him and see, telling them that a spirit does not have flesh and bones as they saw He had. The Apostle John tells of an interview with Thomas. On the first occasion on which Jesus appeared to the disciples and stood in the midst, He shewed them His hands and His side. Thomas was absent! When they told him about it he was unbelieving. Thomas said to them, "*Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.*" After eight days had passed Thomas was given the opportunity to do this but he didn't do it; he could only exclaim, "*My Lord and my God*". In other words, he worshipped Him. This should be our response to our risen and glorious Saviour.

Thinking again of 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle was writing to Christians, and yet some of them said they didn't believe in resurrection. There are some people like that today who think that the grave is the end. There is a man in the Bible whose name is Job and he asked some very searching questions. One was, "*If a man die shall he live again?*" What answer would you give to this question? These Christians at Corinth were going to get a surprise when they read Paul's letter. Let's listen to some of his arguments, "*For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.*" They hadn't thought about that, had they? Their faith was worthless. And then he thinks about those who had died. "*Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*" Had some of them suffered reproach because of their faith? Had it all been in vain? The resurrection of Christ is a **vital** truth.

The Apostle goes on to write with absolute certainty, "*But now is Christ risen from among the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*". 1 Corinthians 15:20. The resurrection of Jesus was 'from among the dead.' Others in their graves lay undisturbed. On one occasion in Mark's Gospel, the Lord Jesus used this expression when speaking to His disciples and they did not understand His words. We remember that in the Old Testament the truth of resurrection was a little unclear; there seemed to have been the idea of a general resurrection. This does not apply in Christianity. Our verse refers to Jesus as the firstfruits of them that slept. The Christians' resurrection will be after the pattern of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This raises a very solemn issue as to those still in the graves. They will stand before the Great White Throne judgement at the end of the Millennium. They had their opportunity but did not respond to the offer of salvation when it was available.

Well, we have covered a lot of ground up to now in our talk on Easter Sunday. Considering the resurrection of the Lord Jesus brings to the believer much assurance and comfort, dispelling our doubts and fears. The Bible says that death is an enemy and no one can deny it. It is no respecter of persons, whether young or old, rich or poor. It intrudes into our lives bringing sadness in its train. However, to the Christian this foe was defeated when Jesus died and rose

again. This does not, of course, make the sadness any less real. But we are not like those who have no hope. There are two verses I will read to you from the Letter to the Hebrews 2:14-15. *“For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”* What a joy it is to belong to One who has defeated the foe. It also brings much **comfort**.

What about assurance? I can remember a few years ago being given a pamphlet, the title of which was ‘Justification in a risen Christ’. I haven’t got this now, so I cannot quote from it. It is in the letter to the Romans 5:1 that we read, *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* To be justified means that we are cleared from all accusation with regard to our guilt as sinners. The resurrection of Jesus gives the assurance that all has been adequately done. If I remember correctly the pamphlet said this: ‘The One who took my place on that cross is free; I am as free as He’. How essential is the truth of Easter Sunday. So much for **assurance**.

Do you have this assurance? It is still the day of grace, although time may be running out. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:2: *“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”* Make sure that you have this salvation today! In another place the same writer puts it like this, *“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”* Romans 10:9. Notice that it is not a case of a mental acceptance of the truth; it is a heart matter.

There is, however, a responsibility in all this as to the way we conduct our lives as Christians. We are told in the letter to the Ephesians that it was the mighty power of God that raised Jesus from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places. That same power is towards us who believe, making us really live. Christ becomes our life. There are some words of a hymn which go like this, ‘Not we may live while here below, but Christ our life may be.’ We were all dead in sins once but now we live. I will read from 2 Corinthians 5:15, *“And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again.”* This is Christian **responsibility**. We have to confess that, as Christians, we often put our own interests first, not the things of Jesus Christ. His love ought to be a powerful motive in our lives.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is a message of victory, of joy, and of hope - Not just for Easter Sunday but for every day of the year. While we wait for the Lord to come, let’s pray that we might be a rejoicing people, *“always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”* 1 Corinthians 15:58.

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