

Resurrection Reality

by Walter A. Maier

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact that offers us hope and eternal life through faith in him.

Duration: 22:03

Scripture: John 14:3, John 20:9, Acts 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:14, 1 Corinthians 15:20, 1 John 3:2, Revelation 1:17-18

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Resurrection Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of life after death and the belief in the resurrection. He emphasizes that our lives are incomplete and unfinished, suggesting that there must be a continuation after death. The preacher also mentions the idea of reward or retribution in the next world to address the injustices and unfairness of life. He uses various examples, such as the homing pigeon and the migration of birds, to illustrate the instinctive desire for immortality. Ultimately, the preacher encourages the audience to trust in God's promises and the love of Jesus, assuring them that through repentance and faith, they will be blessed and able to see God as he is.

Transcript

Victor over death and the grave, O that our hearts and voices could be worthily blended in the praise of thy love and omnipotence, which on this Easter day burst the bonds of death who brought life and immortality to light. Accept, we humbly, and treat thee our human, halting thanks, that thou, our God and Savior, who was in the repose of the sealed and rocky sepulchre, didst on the third day crush sin, hell, and death into everlasting defeat. Teach us to face life and death alike with a courageous assurance that we are thine, so that not even the last enemy death and the gruesomeness of the grave can rob us of the calm hope of the resurrection.

Bless this message, especially in hearts and homes that have been chilled by cold death, and as the Spirit illuminates doubting minds, may we, all doubts and questioning banished, our sins forever removed, be given the grace and the wisdom to kneel before thee, our Savior of the riven side and the wounded hand, and to confess thee our Lord, our God, our life, our salvation. On this glorious Easter day, as we stand in spirit before the Savior's open grave, let us ask ourselves frankly, what is it that magnetizes the faith of Christian hearts all over the world today and draws them to this broken sepulchre? History knows far more pretentious burial places than Joseph's grave, where the lifeless body of the Savior was laid to its repose. Recent excavations have uncovered the extended tombs of the Sumerian kings in Ur of the Chaldees.

In Egypt, the tomb of Tutankhamen, with its lavish wealth and its artistic adornment, has impressed even our age. In the Red Square at Moscow, the remains of the red dictator Lenin, preserved by a mysterious process, are regarded with an admiration that approaches worship. But even the site of our Savior's grave is not definitely known.

Mohammedans heckle Christian missionaries with the challenge, we have the tomb of our great prophet Mohammed here in Medina. Why, you Christians have nothing. But at Easter we have everything.

While all of the tombs are evidences of death and decay, Christ's tomb alone is the evidence of life. We hear the angel challenge, why seek he the living among the dead? And we recall the burial places enshrined in the grateful memory of the nation's Flanders fields, where poppies grow between the crosses, row on row. We think of the sepulchres of other distinguished leaders and statesmen, all of which commemorate brilliant or generous lives that run their course only to end in inevitable death.

But our Savior's grave offers life, hope, and blessing, even though we may never be able to mark the garden grave of our Lord. The reality of his resurrection must be a strong and vital power in our faith and lives. Even though the ranks of 20th century scoffers are daily swollen by those who demand, where is the proof of the next life, the evidence of the resurrection? We must cling to the Easter pledge of heaven, and as we approach our risen Savior, the blood and agony and the death of Calvary forever overcome, acclaim him the living Christ.

To strengthen our faith and remove all distrust of the resurrection message, let us concentrate our thoughts of in this festival broadcast on our Easter assurance and taking the words of Saint Paul, 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 14, God hath both raised up the Lord and will also raise up us by his own power. Find faith and hope in the Savior's resurrection and in our eternal Easter with him. First of all, let us impress this conviction deeply in our minds.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ rests on fact as well as on faith. Repeatedly do Old Testament passages foretell his resurrection. Emphatically did Jesus himself, before he went the way of the cross, tell his friends and his enemies that on the third day after his crucifixion he would rise from the dead.

Six different and independent accounts, one in each of the four gospels, one in the book of Acts, and one from the pen of Saint Paul, recount his triumph over death. Scores of passages in the remainder of the New Testament speak of the Savior's resurrection with a clarity that tolerates no uncertainty. Do you know any other fact in the history of the first century that has as much support as the resurrection of Christ? If the Easter record is not in every claim the account of history, if the statements of those who testified to the Easter truth are not accepted as conclusive evidence, then no testimony and no evidence whatever can establish any truth in any age of history.

The proof that God hath raised up the Lord comes to us from other convincing sources. What was it that took the first company of the disciples, cowering as they did behind the locked doors, and transformed them into a band of confident champions of their crucified Lord, not a dead Savior, but a living, conquering Christ? What power and influence changed the cross from an instrument of bloody torture to the most beloved of all symbols? Uncounted thousands had been crucified before the day of our Savior, and you know that if he had not risen from the dead, no right-minded person would have glorified anything as hideous and repulsive as that timber and cross being stained with the Savior's blood. What gave the great army of Christian martyrs and missionaries the love, the power to face death, to penetrate poisonous jungles, to cross barren deserts, to hasten to the ends of the earth in their zeal for winning disciples for

their Savior? Only blind fanaticism could lead them to serve a dead Lord whose resurrection promises had failed and whose body had molded in the grave.

There is no fanaticism in our faith. We have the eternal facts, the everlasting truth of the Savior's conquest of death, in every hope that we breathe, with every conviction that we utter, in every article of the faith that we confess. Jesus had to rise again, and by this miracle of all miracles, place the seal of assurance upon the forgiveness of our sins.

For a dead Christ could be no Savior. An unopened grave would mean an unopened heaven. By bursting the bonds of the tomb, Jesus proved himself for all men and for all ages the conqueror of sin and showed the everlasting validity of his atonement.

The sacrifice on Calvary had fulfilled its purpose. The ransom price paid for your sins and mine had been accepted. No wonder that great men of God have found their highest comfort in this Easter assurance.

God hath raised up the Lord. Luther would dispel all despondency with the one word, vivid, the Latin for he lives. Many times he seized a piece of chalk and wrote this vivid on his study table or voiced it in triumph.

When asked for an explanation, he answered, Jesus lives, and if he were not among the living, I would not wish to live a single hour. Let us all try with the Spirit's help to engrave this Easter truth, he lives, into our hearts. For if we remove the resurrection reality from our Christian faith, we have less hope than the heathens.

While with the blessing of Easter faith, we have the living Christ, his sustaining companionship, his guiding help, his burden-sharing presence, his never-failing leadership, his divine counsel, and above all this, his eternal salvation, his everlasting atonement, his never-ending redemption. With faith in Christ's resurrection, our text offers us this pledge, God will also raise up us by his own power. The open grave becomes the pledge of our immortality, the Savior's resurrected body, the promise of our glorified bodies, the Easter cry, O death, where is thy sting? The echo of our own triumph, O grave, where is thy victory? With faith in the Easter morning greeting, he is not here, he is risen, the great problem of the human soul and its destiny, that ageless perplexity which has baffled the choicest mind, brings a blessed and personal solution for every one of us.

At the empty tomb we learn that the one short, perplexing life which is ours does not complete our destiny, that the grave is not a last and futile chapter in our life's history, that we are not human bundles of cellular matter consigned to decay. With the great stone rolled from the entrance of the Savior's rock-hewn grave, every doubt and obstacle concerning our own eternity is removed, and as the promises of God in Christ push aside the draperies concealing the hereafter, we must catch a foregleam of a new and blessed existence that starts when this life stops. We must discover a pre-vision of a heavenly glorified body.

Only in the power of Christ's resurrection can we gain strength and assurance for our eternal Easter. Men may dream dreams of a hereafter and draw pretty pictures of life to come, but our resurrection reality must be woven of firmer textures. Ask the botanist and he will point you to the lily which in its white beauty has become the flower of the Easter festival.

Its bulb lies buried and unseen in the black ground until by the mysterious force of life a shaft of green breaks through the earth and as the sun smiles in its warming rays the tender stalk grows in height and strength. A cluster of buds appears and then a lily in all its fairness and fragrance. So we are told the

grave becomes the garden of God's new creation.

The lifeless body reposes in its dark embrace. It decays, yet by the power of God a new body, pure and sinless, arises. Ask the naturalist and he will offer a picture of the resurrection in the spring and autumnal migration of the bird.

He will show you winged creatures that fly 7,000 miles from the Yukon Valley to southern Argentina guided by their instinct and he will conclude that an inborn sense of immortality must irresistibly summon man to seek and find his everlasting home in a better and happier land. He will tell you that we are all like the homing pigeon and that when we are released we shall fly back to the God whose love created us. The philosopher has a dozen different arguments for life after death.

He believes that death cannot end all because our lives are so incomplete and unfinished that there must be a continuation just as he insists. There must be a reward or retribution in the next world by which all the injustice and unfairness of life can be adjusted. Its wrongs righted, its losses compensated, its sins atoned.

We need not argue the reality of our resurrection on these grounds, nor rest our hope for a reunion with those who have gone before us in the faith, on the reawakening of nature, or on the claims that the higher forces which created man could not brutally destroy him forever. Others may question the resurrection, argue its probability, and debate its verity. But in the words of Jesus, we have surety, conviction, truth.

When our perfect and unfailing Lord promises, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. When he adds certainty to certainty by repeating, because I live, ye shall live also. Where I am, there shall also my servant be.

If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. The issue is closed. The immortality of the soul is not a matter of speculation and guess and conjecture.

It is the unchangeable truth of God himself bestowed through the only sure antidote to death, the blood of Jesus Christ, which forever removes the cause of death, the sin that would separate us from the Father. Oh, we must cling to this doctrine of our resurrection, even though its promises seem far too merciful for our sin-bound lives. When Dr. Morrison was translating the Bible into Chinese, and he came upon the passage, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

One of his assistants, a native scholar, exclaimed, oh, my people can never believe that they shall see their Savior and their God face to face. Let me rather translate, for we may hope to kiss his feet. But Dr. Morrison replied, give the word of God as it is, and when we take God at his promises and penitently trust in our Savior's love, all the sin and selfishness that would tear us away from God vanishes, and unworthy, unholy, unhappy as we may be, we are blessed by the promise that we shall see him as he is.

Many of you sang at your Easter services, in one of the last stanzas of the hymn, I know that my Redeemer lives, these reassuring lines, he lives and grants me daily breath, he lives and I shall conquer death, he lives my mansions to prepare, he lives to bring me safely there. Do you know that Samuel Medley, who wrote these lines, was converted to the faith from a wild and dissolute life, and that overcoming sin, he could die in the hope of his Easter hymn, and on his deathbed declare, I am a poor shattered bark, just about to gain the blissful harbor, and oh how sweet will be the port after the storm, dying is sweet, sweet work, my Heavenly Father, I am looking to my dear Jesus, my God, my portion, my all in all, so in the radiance of the Easter mercy, and in the power of the resurrection glory, may the Spirit

of God bring into your penitent believing hearts, the assurance that since Jesus was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification, the gift of God is eternal life. We must build our hopes on the reality of the resurrection, even though the human mind staggers, when it is asked to believe that the body returned to the dust whence it sprang, can be revived and rebuilt, that our human frame with all its blemishes and imperfections, can be molded in a new and perfect form.

One day in the laboratory of Michael Faraday, the great chemist, a workman accidentally knocked a silver cup into a jar of acid. The cup was consumed by the powerful solution. When Faraday, that stalwart confessor of Christ, heard of the disappearance of the cup, he threw some chemicals into the acid, and soon the dissolved particles of silver were precipitated.

The metal was reclaimed, sent to a silversmith, and recast into a graceful cup. Does not the inference suggest itself, that if a chemist can perform this reconstruction, surely the Almighty God can gather the particles of our body, though they be scattered to the four winds, and change that which is shown a natural body into a spiritual body? And if you tell me that this is only an analogy, then I point you to those resurrection miracles, which prove the power of God, not only the reawakening of Jairus' daughter, not only the restored life of the widow's son at Nahum, not only the resurrection of Lazarus after decomposition had started, but on Easter particularly to the triumph of our Savior and his victorious promise, because I live, ye shall live also. Unless we believe unquestioningly and unhesitatingly that through the Savior's resurrection, life and eternity are ours, we have no guidepost to lead us through the maze of life.

In the catacombs at Rome, the burial places of the pagan dead and of the early Christians are marked by a notable contrast. The heathen graves are inscribed with dedication to the gods of the lower world, and sometimes they abound in sarcasm and resentment. Death is often pictured as an eternal sleep or an unhappy existence of gloom and hopelessness, but the favorite expression on the Christian graves are he rests in peace or he lives forever, or weep not, my child, death is not eternal.

On the epitaphs of those who were ready to lay down their lives for the faith, we find the sustaining power for the sorrow of death in our own family and in our own life. Easter gives comfort particularly for those whose heart aches under recent bereavement. Self-confident men and women who accept the doctrine of resurrection sometimes question it when death touches their own home, but may God give to you all through the risen Christ the faith that is fitted for these crucial tests.

May he lead every one of you, and especially those who are ready to charge God with heartlessness, to stand at the open grave and hear the promise, God will also raise up us by his power. When the armies of Napoleon swept over Europe, one of his generals made a surprise attack on the little town of Selkirk on the Austrian border. It was Easter, and as the formidable French army maneuvered on the heights above Selkirk, the council of its citizens was hastily summoned to deliberate upon the alternative of surrender or defense.

It was in this assembly that the venerable dean of the church arose to declare, this is Easter day. We have been counting on our own strength and it will fail. This is the day of the Lord's resurrection.

Let us ring the bells and have services as usual and leave the matter in God's hands. We know only our weakness and not the power of God. His counsel was accepted, and in a moment or two the church belfry chimed with the joyous bells announcing the Savior's resurrection.

The enemy, hearing the sudden peal, concluded that the Austrian army had arrived during the night. The enemy broke up camp, and before the Easter bells had ceased, the danger had been lifted. Oh, let the joy of Easter ring in your heart and all the doubt and gloom that surrounds you, ready to despoil your life and crush your hopes forever, will similarly vanish.

God grant every one of us in this wide Easter congregation of the air the faith and the victory that will unite us through the blessing of these resurrection realities in the eternal mansions prepared for us by him who lived for us, who died for us, but on that first Easter day arose again for us. Amen.

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