

Easter - Resurrection Life

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Date: 05 April 2026

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[0 : 00] Easter, some Resurrection Sunday, and it really marks what I would say is the most momentous! occasion, the most momentous weekend, we'll call it, in all of human history.

The death, the burial, and then the final resurrection of Jesus Christ. You know, some people think that this story, some people call it the greatest story ever told, is just that.

It's just a story. It's something that Christians tell themselves to give them comfort in life and even in death.

And you know that there are even some churches, people that gather together like this, and they'll sit in church, and there will be a minister of some kind up here, and they will say, you know what?

This is just a story. They've abandoned the teachings of Scripture. They teach that the resurrection of Jesus is just some kind of great grand metaphor, an illustration to teach us something about life.

[1 : 07] Of course, nobody ever rises from the dead. That's impossible. But we can experience a life of new hope and possibilities just by looking at this metaphor.

In fact, there's a prominent theologian, a liberal theologian. His name is Marcus Borg, and this is a quote from him. He says, the resurrection is not about a dead body walking out of a tomb.

It's about the triumph of love over hate, of life over despair. Another one, his name, John Shelby Sponge, says this, I think Easter is most powerfully understood as a symbol of possibility, a spiritual metaphor for rebirth and renewal.

But I'd like us to consider something else today. That if the resurrection of Jesus Christ is simply a metaphor, simply a made-up story, then we as Christians, of all the people in the world, are the most pathetic religious people that there ever was.

And you know what? It's not just me saying that. Did you know that that is what the Bible explicitly teaches? If you have a Bible, open it to the book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 15.

[2 : 36] 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. If you don't have a Bible, you should be able to find one underneath one of the chairs in front of you. 1 Corinthians is kind of towards the end of the Bible, maybe about 80 or 90% of the way through.

And we're going to look at a passage in which Paul, the apostle, he is writing to a church, a brand new church. This is within a generation after the resurrection of Jesus.

And Jesus has gone on to heaven, and he is spreading the gospel about Jesus and what he did for the sins of the world. And there's this church in Corinth. And in this church, he had gone and he planted it, he started it.

We don't know the size of the church, but then he had left, continued on his journey to continue to preach the gospel, start new churches. And he heard these rumblings back in Corinth, that they were believing and teaching something that he never taught them, something counter to what he had taught them.

And they had some people who had passed away, some believers who had died. And there were people saying, well, you know what, when you die, you're just gone. You just cease to exist.

[3 : 55] And so there is no kind of new life, there's no kind of resurrection from the dead for the Christian. And so he wrote this letter, and particularly this chapter, to address that.

And I want to read, we're going to read several parts of this, in this message this morning. We're going to start chapter 15, verse 12. Here's what he says to them. Now, if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

He says, when I came to you, I preached to you that Jesus rose from the dead. And now you're saying, well, that's impossible. None of our people who have passed away will rise from the dead.

Verse 13. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty. And your faith is also empty. The faith that you have is meaningless if Jesus is still in the grave.

Verse 15. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God. If Jesus is in the grave, then my whole message is a lie. And I am a false witness of what God has done.

[5 : 10] Because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise up, if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ, they have simply perished.

If, in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then our faith is meaningless.

There is no meaning to it. All the good things that we might do, the ways that we might try to improve our behavior, our attitude in life, all of it means nothing. He mentions here in this passage two consequences for our faith if Christ did not rise.

One, he says that we as Christians were still in our sins, the sins that we have committed, the ways that we have hurt people in our life. We still owe that debt to somebody, to God, and we're going to have to pay for that ourselves.

[6 : 27] And the second thing that he mentions is that the Christians who have died physically, he uses the euphemism, who have fallen asleep, they're gone forever.

And we'll never see them again. And these two consequences of the resurrection not being real speak to the two big problems that Jesus Christ solved when he died on a cross and rose again. And those two problems can both be summed up in one word. And that word is death. It's a two-fold problem. They're both related to one another.

One is the physical death where we die, where one day each one of us will give our last breath. And then the other is a different kind of death that we call spiritual death.

We'll talk briefly about both of them. You know, death is the number one enemy of man. Our number one enemy is not the Ayatollah in Iran.

[7 : 41] It's not, you know, the opposite political party, you know, that we're constantly fighting against. It's not our neighbor, you know, who keeps cutting down our trees or whatever it is, right?

The number one enemy in our life today is death. And we all experience that around us.

Not personally, otherwise you wouldn't be here. But all of us have experienced death surrounding us. It's the ultimate statistic in life. Ten out of ten people die.

None of us can escape it. It seems by every account that is inescapable. And, you know, because of that, some people just, you know, eventually at some point in their life, they just come to terms with it.

Someday, I'm going to die and I just need to be okay with that. Accepting reality, a reality that we all will face.

[8 : 40] Yet, at the same time, there is something in us, something more powerful than just our logical brain that really yearns to defy death, to escape the pain of death, to transcend its darkness.

Something in us wants to live forever. And why is that? It's because that's the way God designed us to be. You know, the scripture testifies to this.

In 2 Corinthians 5, verse 4, it says this, for we who are in this tent, talking about our bodies, we groan. Anybody, anybody can feel that?

We groan in these bodies. The older you get, the more you groan. Being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, not because we want to just leave our body and be dead, but instead, we yearn to be further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

That these bodies that age and have problems and get disease and injuries, that we would have the same bodies but ones that never die.

[9 : 56] That is what we yearn for. And you know what? We yearn for that even though we have all kinds of heartache that we experience in this life. Suffering. We don't want to be separated from our family and friends even though sometimes they're knuckleheads.

and they say mean things and they're rude to us but still, there's something right about relationships with people that we love and we enjoy. We don't want to be separated from joy and laughter in life. We don't want to be separated from the warm sunshine and cool summer breezes. We don't want to be separated from those beautiful picturesque sunrises and those glorious sunsets.

We don't want to be separated from our work and art and creativity that we fill our lives with. And all of these things God intended for us to enjoy despite the brokenness that we find in the world. All of this is part of God's design and we want to keep on enjoying them. We want to live and we want to keep on living on and on and on.

[11 : 05] In the book of Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes, the author of Ecclesiastes puts it this way, that God has put eternity into our hearts. There's something in our hearts built in that wants to live forever.

So what happened? Well, as with many things, we go back to the beginning in the Bible and the book of Genesis and it describes there in that garden.

God put a man and a woman in a garden as a gift to them for them to work. And in Genesis chapter 2 verse 16 it says this, this is his instruction to the man and the woman.

And the Lord God commanded the man saying of every tree of the garden you may eat freely but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

You know, our first parents ended up, what? They disobeyed that command. Sin, the Bible says, entered into the world because they rejected God's command and it brought death into the world.

[12 : 16] The Bible tells us that it was through the sin of that one man, Adam, that death entered into the world. God designed us, mankind, to be immortal. But things broke down.

Describing the curse that came after this great fall in Genesis 3, verse 19, this is the curse of that fall, the one given to man. He says this, in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

For out of it you were taken, for dust you are, and to dust you shall return. Many times those words are quoted maybe at a funeral. But did you know that that is not how God intended it to be?

He made us from the dust but did not intend that we would be returned to it. But sin entered the world.

And there's another kind of death that entered into the world at the same time. We just talked about physical death, now we're going to talk about another kind called spiritual death.

[13 : 24] What is spiritual death? Well, I think the best way to describe it, you know, when somebody dies physically, you can think about it as a separation. You have your inner man, that soul or spirit part of you that is immaterial, that animates our bodies but our body is more like a tent, right?

The Bible describes it that way as a tent. And so at death, at physical death, our soul, spirit, it separates from our body. There's a separation there. spiritual death is a kind of death that is really a description of our relationship to God.

In spiritual death, we are separated from the God who created us. God created us to know him. That's what he created us for.

That is our primary purpose in life is to know him. In John chapter 17, verse 3, Jesus describes eternal life. You might think, well, eternal life is just living forever.

Well, he describes it in a little bit more particular terms. He says this, this is in his prayer to the Father, but he's praying this so that his disciples can hear. He says this, and this is eternal life that they may know you, he says, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

[14 : 44] eternal life is the opposite of spiritual death. Eternal life is knowing God. Knowing God the Father and also knowing his Son.

But you know what? Our sins have gotten in the way of that. Adam and Eve's first sin, but is it just theirs? No. It's ours as well.

In Isaiah chapter 59, verse 2, the prophet says this to the people of Israel. But your iniquities, that's another word for sins, your sins have separated you from your God and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear.

Sin separates us from God. Paul says the same thing in the New Testament. In the book of Ephesians, chapter 2, he says this, the first verse, talking about this new life that we can experience as Christians, he says, and you, he made alive, but he talks about their past, who were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked according to the course of this world.

all of those of us who once walked just according to the ways of the world, just doing what's best for number one, looking out for numero uno, regardless of how it might hurt other people.

[16:11] That is the course of this world. And because of that, we were dead spiritually in our trespasses and sins. Well, sins like violence and thievery, cheating, exploiting others, selfishness, living for ourselves, infidelity.

And just like all of those sins tend to separate us from the people that we hurt, we've all experienced that, I'm sure. When someone sins against us, when we sin against them, it causes a rift, separation in our relationship.

Until hopefully forgiveness comes. And that's the way that it is with God as well. Our sins have separated us from Him. And that's where the solution comes in.

There are two problems, two kinds of death, and the resurrection solves both of them. But in two parts, in two phases. One that we get now, a solution that we get now, and another that we get in the future.

Right now, every person can experience spiritual life in Christ. And in the future, for those of us who put our faith and trust in Him, we can experience immortality.

[17:39] Going back to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he says, you know, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then you're still in your sins. If Jesus is dead, your sins can't be forgiven.

But are we still in our sins as believers? Well, let's read some passages from the Bible. Here's Romans 6, 4. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life.

we have been given a new life in Christ because of His resurrection. Ephesians 2, 4 says this, but God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, He made us alive together with Christ, for by grace you have been saved. and He raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That's a description of spiritual life in which our sins are forgiven and we have a restored relationship with God.

Peace with God. Another one, Colossians 2, verse 13 says this, and you being dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, a reference there back to the Old Testament law of circumcision, He has made alive together with Him.

[19:12] We have been made alive spiritually with Jesus Christ. A relationship restored. Having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us and He has taken them out of the way, nailing them to the cross.

And the last passage we'll read on that topic in Romans 4, verse 23, he's speaking about how back in the past the man named, the original patriarch, Abraham, how he was made righteous because he believed that something that God promised him.

And Paul's big idea in Romans is if we believe something that God did for us, specifically dying for our sins on the cross, then we also can be declared as righteous, as not guilty.

And this is what he says in that regard. Now it was not written for his sake, talking about Abraham, alone, that it was imputed to him, that righteousness was imputed, but also for us.

it shall be imputed to us who believe in him, who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses. He died on the cross for our sins, not his own.

[20:36] Jesus didn't sin in his life, but he died on our behalf for our sins. And then it finishes up with this, and he was raised for our justification.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead made us, made all of those who put their trust in him 100% righteous. A kind of righteousness that Paul says elsewhere, he calls the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

He considers us not guilty. So now, that is what we have now for those of us who trust in Christ. We have this life that is in God, in Christ, in the Spirit.

Romans 8, 10 says this, and if Christ is in you, the body is dead. So your body, it's still decaying, it's still getting older, still has problems.

And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin. There's still sin in the world, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. Elsewhere, it says that, you know, our physical body is decaying, but our inner man is being renewed day by day by day because we live in Christ.

[21:53] That is our life now. But then in the next verse, Romans 8, 11, he continues on and talks about something that is coming. But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, if you are a believer, if you are part of God's family, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

The same Spirit that the Bible says that raised Jesus from the dead will also one day give life and immortality to our bodies.

some people think, oh, when you die, you know, you just forever float around, you know, either in heaven on clouds or maybe you're down in hell, whatever it might be, but you're just disembodied. God did not design us that way.

He designed us to be embodied people. And you know that Jesus himself, he took on flesh, the Bible says. He has a body.

And the Bible says that we will have one that is like his one day. Continuing on in that same chapter, Romans chapter 8, in verse 23, it says this, not only that, but we also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, so we've gotten this forgiveness from God, he calls the first fruits, even we ourselves groan within ourselves eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

[23 : 26] One day, we will receive that redemption. We'll be able to kind of turn in. The Bible says that we have this seal. It's like a down payment.

And then one day, we'll get to turn that in for what God has intended for us, for immortal bodies. So, our relationship with God has been restored through forgiveness.

All of our sins as Christians washed away. But, that's just the beginning. There's more coming.

Back to that letter to the Corinthians that Paul wrote regarding the resurrection.

He speaks again about those who sleep. to the very heart of their misunderstanding. So, chapter 15 again in verse 20, he says this, but now, Christ is risen from the dead.

It's true that he is. This is the core, the crux of our faith. And has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. What happened to Jesus is like a precursor, a prequel to what is going to happen with us.

[24 : 43] for since by man came death. Remember, Adam, through Adam and Eve, we all died, we all took on immortality, even so, in Christ, all shall be made alive.

But each one in his own order. Christ the first fruits, so Jesus, he was raised from the dead first. Afterward, those who are Christ's at his coming, so all of those who are in Christ, who are part of God's family, when he finally returns, and he is coming again, we will also be raised from the dead. Verse 24, then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all rule and all authority and all power, for he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet.

The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For believers, spiritual death has already been destroyed. It's already gone.

We've trusted in Christ. We no longer experience that separation from God. We have peace with him. But there's still one last enemy to be destroyed, and that is death.

[26 : 01] Towards the end of Jesus' ministry, this is just a week or so, I think, before he went to the cross. A messenger came and said, Jesus, one of your friends, his name's Lazarus, he's very, very ill.

His family wants you to come to see him. Jesus actually delayed for a few days, and a messenger came again, and they said, Jesus, he's gone.

Lazarus died from that sickness. and so this passage that I'm going to read kind of as a continuation of that story.

John 11, 20, Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Remember, Jesus had a miracle working ministry. He healed lots of sick people. If you would have just been here, you would not have died. But even now, I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give it to you.

[27 : 07] Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?

She said to him, yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world. So I ask you the same question that Jesus asked to Martha.

Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Do you believe that he rose again in order to purchase your redemption, your righteousness?

Paul tells us more back in that same 1 Corinthians 15, what it is that we're supposed to believe in order to join God's family. It's a message the Bible calls simply the gospel, the good news.

[28 : 14] And again, this message is the only reason why we as a church exist, both this church here in Springfield and the church global across the world.

This is the only reason is this gospel message. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 1, Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved.

If you hold fast that word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain, for I delivered to you, first of all, that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

That is the good news. Jesus died, again, not for no reason, not for his own sins, he died for our sins. He was buried and then he rose again on the third day.

Just, by the way, when he says according to the scriptures, just as was foretold by the prophets.

You see, he died for not just the sins of the world, he died for your sins.

[29 : 28] Did you know that there's a judgment day coming? And that's, that's been in the scriptures since the very beginning. There's coming a day in which God will judge the living and the dead. He will judge the righteous and the wicked.

He will judge the whole world. And there are only two options for those who stand before God on judgment day. Either you will bear the guilt and the responsibility for your own sins, or Jesus Christ will bear them for you.

And that's not a decision that we make then. It's a decision that we make now. For as appointed unto man wants to die, the Bible says.

And after that, the judgment. And there's only one way to get that gift that Jesus provided.

And only Jesus, right? No other religions in the world offer this. They offer teachings about how to live a good life and maybe how to have a good attitude. But none of them, none of them offer the forgiveness of sins from God through an atoning sacrifice of God himself.

[30 : 46] Revelation 1.18 says this. This is Jesus speaking to John. John's having this great vision about the end times. Jesus actually appears to him. And this is how he describes himself.

He says, I am he who lives and was dead and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of hell and death.

Jesus is the only one that holds those keys. Not anyone else. Not me. Not the Pope. Not some Eastern guru out there.

Jesus and him alone. And because he lives, we also can live with him forever. So, my question to everyone here in this room, I know most of you but not all of you, have you received eternal life? If you have not, God made this as simple as can be. You do not have to climb any mountains. You do not have to plumb the depths of the ocean.

[31 : 53] The Bible says that there is this word, this gospel message that is right in front of you.

And it's that message that we preach that Jesus died for the sins of the world. And all you have to do is reach out and accept that message and receive it.

Believe that it's true. Believe that it's true for you. Accept it. That that is what you want to put your life on. Not on your own merit because that's what most people do.

Well, one day if I stand before God, well, I hope that I've been good enough. Many people, that's their plan. That's a bad plan. It is a bad plan.

I look at my own life, I'm in big trouble. Don't trust your own goodness, your own merit.

when you have an alternative. Somebody who's willing to give you his own righteousness. And so for anyone who believes, you can receive that eternal life, that forgiveness of sins, that restored relationship with God right now.

[33 : 01] And then a promise in the future of a resurrection life to come. The Bible says today is the day of salvation.

You know what that means? Don't wait until tomorrow. Did you know that God doesn't promise anybody a tomorrow? We have today. And some of us might not make it tomorrow.

Hopefully we all do. But today is the day in which we need to make that decision for the Lord. And then I want to end with a reminder for believers.

For believers. For those of us who maybe have been living the Christian life for a year, two, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years. Some of us.

You know what? If Jesus rose from the dead, you know what that means? Everything's going to be okay. Whatever's happening in your life, whatever kind of heartache or pain or suffering that maybe you're going through in life, everything is going to be okay.

[34 : 17] God has promised us that. We have a, we have our sins forgiven right now and a hope of a future that is abundant beyond our imagination.

So really, what is there left to fear? What is there left to fret about? What is there left to despair over? You know, everyone in life encounters trouble.

We all face difficulties, pain, heartache, suffering. And Christians are not immune from those same things that everyone else faces.

In fact, the Bible even promises that we will face the same thing. But regardless of all those troubles, we have two things.

We have one, a relationship with God that has been restored to us that we can enjoy today and tomorrow and all the days of our life and on and on into eternity.

[35 : 20] And number two, we have an eternity to look forward to with God and all of his people, all of those who put their faith and trust in him.

And an abundant life, a life that will be so amazing that the Bible says it's more amazing than you can even think or imagine.

Now, I can imagine a lot. But the Bible says it's more than we can even imagine. And all of this simply because on a day more than 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

Are you grateful that he did that for you? Let's go ahead. Let's all stand up. I'd like to sing the last verse of that Christ arose, number 357.

If you open up your hymnals, let me see if I can find mine. Here it is. Oh, and Sophie, you're going to play for us.

[36 : 27] Thank you so much. I know I didn't prepare you, but I appreciate that. So you just give us an intro, and we'll just sing the last verse, the third verse together. death cannot keep his prey.

Jesus, my Savior, needs pour the bars away. Jesus, my Lord.

Here we go. Ah, from the grave He arose with a mighty triumph for His foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign.

He arose. He arose. He arose. Hallelujah. Christ arose. Amen.

He is risen. He is risen indeed. Go with God, everybody.