

Text: I Corinthians 15:20

Theme: What Christ's Resurrection Means To Me

Date: March 23, 2008 (Easter Festival)

Dear Fellow Believers in Christ's Resurrection:

It's so good to see all of you here this morning. Whether you're here every week, whether you're here once in a while, whether you're here for the first time - it's great to see you here today. Rest assured that no matter who you are, the message of Easter speaks to you. That's because the message of Christ's resurrection is a message to the whole world, but not in the abstract, not to a mass of nameless and faceless people. The resurrection of Jesus Christ speaks to every single person in this world as an individual, personally, one on one. Jesus is alive and that matters to you! Paul says, **CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD.** That message says something to every person here today, no matter who you are, and it has meaning for all areas of our life - for the past, for the present, and for the future. On the basis of God's Word, therefore, today we'll look at: **What Christ's resurrection means to me:** 1) for my past, 2) for my present, 3) for my future.

1. For My Past

Christ's resurrection speaks to my past. And do I ever need it! When I look at my past, I am not impressed. The world around us loves to lead us to take pride in the past, to boast about our achievements, to revel in what loving, serving, giving people we are and how much we've accomplished. But God's Word says that's all a bunch of garbage. The prophet Isaiah says that even our best good works are nothing but filthy rags before God. The Apostle Paul calls all the good works he does rubbish and trash. We might be able to make ourselves look good on the outside, but God tells us we're rotten to the core on the inside. When we are honest with ourselves and admit our greed and how we covet money, our envy and how jealous we are of others, our lust and our dirty mind, our anger and the desire for revenge, we can't help but be ashamed of our past sins, and we should be too.

Why? Because God doesn't just demand of us that we do good things or that we say good things. He especially demands that we think good things, and that we think those good things all the time in everything we think about and every situation we're in with every person we deal with in every age of our lives. That's why God gave two Commandments on coveting, not just one. That's why Jesus said, *"Whoever looks at a woman with lust in his heart has committed adultery."* He wants holy hearts and pure motives for everything we do. So He doesn't just want us to obey our parents. He wants us to want to obey them. He doesn't just want us to be kind to our enemies. He wants us to want to do that. He doesn't just want us to come to worship services every week. He wants us to want to do that. He doesn't want us just to give our offerings. He wants us to want to give our offerings. When I look at my past and when you look at yours, we have to admit that our hearts haven't always wanted to do the things we've done.

Christ's resurrection speaks to that. Christ's resurrection says about our past: *"It's forgiven! The hell you deserve for your wretched, sinful past life has already been suffered."* Christ's resurrection happened in the past, just as all of our sins to this point in our lives did. And that resurrection happened in the past because Jesus paid the debt for all our sins. The Bible says, *"Christ was handed over to death because of our sins and was raised to life because of our being declared righteous."* The fact that Jesus is alive right now says to each person here today: *"You are forgiven! You are declared righteous! You are a saint, a holy person before God!"* All our past sins were taken off of us and laid on Jesus, the Lamb of God, and we know what He did with them last Friday. The fact that Jesus is alive today is proof that He really meant it when He shouted from that cross: *"It is finished!"*

Because Christ rose from the dead, we don't have to live in the past. Jesus has wiped our slate clean. All the baggage of our past life, all our past sins, our mistakes and messups - they're all gone, buried in the depths of the sea, the Bible says, and removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Likewise the past sins, past mistakes, past insults, past offenses that have been committed against us by someone else - they don't rule our lives either. All the things that people have done to hurt us - and there certainly have been plenty of them since we live in a sinful world - they don't control our lives. Whether it be our husband or our wife, our children or our parents, our co-workers or our neighbors, our friends or our acquaintances - all the bad things these people did to us were also placed on Jesus and He took care of them on the cross too. That message frees us from living in the sins of our past and frees us to turn our attention to the present. And that's part two of our sermon: What Christ's resurrection means to me for my present.

2. For My Present

Christ's resurrection means that I can now say "No!" to sin. Because Jesus rose from the dead, the Gospel of Jesus is more powerful than my sinful nature. Of course, the world around us thinks just the opposite. Our own sinful nature thinks just the opposite. These two enemies of ours think, *"If Christ forgave all my sins, now I can go out and sin all I want. Now I can have all the sinful fun I want and still be forgiven."* The unbelieving world and our own sinful thinking will always think that the Easter Gospel of Jesus is a license or a freedom to sin. Rest assured, such think is not from God, but from the devil.

Because Jesus rose from the dead, that assures me my sins are forgiven and that message leads me to love Jesus, to love God, to think: *"God, You would do that for me, even though I don't deserve it at all? What a wonderful God You are! How can I say, 'Thank You?'"*

How can I express my gratitude? How can I tell You how much I love You for that?" And God tells us how. He says, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* The message of Christ's resurrection conquers our thoughts of pride and envy and anger and lust. The message of Easter gives me the power to exercise spiritual self-discipline. The message of Easter helps me conquer my natural tendency to be manipulative and hypocritical. Because Christ rose from the dead, I can now see that I'm not the center of the universe, but Jesus and the Triune God is, and I love this God who first loved me and I want to serve this God. That's what Christ's resurrection means to me in the present.

Of course, there's always a struggle, a process, an on-going war - and that's why we run to God's Word. That's why we come to worship services. That's why we come to the Lord's Supper. That's why we gather together with our fellow Christians around the Holy Bible. Jesus gives us His resurrection power in the present through only one means - through the gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments. Every Sunday in worship you hear these words or similar words of absolution directly from our God through the lips of your preacher: *"Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us and for His sake forgives us all our sins."* The resurrection of Jesus Christ that our pastors and fellow Christians announce to us gives us the power to keep on living in our daily lives.

And do we ever need that! We need Christ's resurrection power to keep on living in the present to face punching the time card every weekday morning, to get the kids up and off to school, to clean the house and get all the laundry done, to keep on caring for that aging parent or grandparent, to put up with that hostile and arrogant boss, to be kind and patient to that rude salesman, to keep on making the effort to get along with that quarrelsome neighbor - and you can plug into the blank whatever things God has put on your plate in life. Remember, Jesus lives! That message gives me God's Gospel power to live my life in the glow of His love, no matter how tough it gets.

3. For My Future

That confidence in God's Gospel power goes right on into the future. Because Christ rose from the dead, we can face the future with confidence. Jesus is alive right now, and He's never going to die again. That means that God, on His part, will never stop loving me, no matter what. That means that God, on His part, will never stop forgiving me, no matter what. Because Jesus rose from the dead, I know that I can never sin in such a way that God would finally say, *"Okay, I've had it with you. I've had enough of your sins and your mistakes. I'm out of love, so you're out of here."* Yes, people can and do turn their backs on God. But because Jesus rose from the dead, God will never turn His back on us. We have this assurance for the future: God will love us in the future just as much as He loved us in the past and loves us in the present. He'll love us tomorrow, next year, 10 years from now, 50 years from now just as He does today. **Because Jesus will be just as much alive then as He is now!**

What a power source that is for us and for our future. The Apostle Paul wrote: *"Therefore, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us power to keep on going into the future, to take it on, and to know that *"we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* For while we don't know what the future holds for us, we do know Who holds the future: our risen Lord Jesus Christ!

This risen Jesus has told us that all things must work for good for those who are Christians. Jesus lives to control every single aspect of our lives in the future. He lives to get us through our job loss or our layoff. He lives to help us face going off to high school or college. He lives to give us strength to face the dating scene and getting married and having a family. He lives to give us strength to face a husband or a wife deserting us through divorce. He lives to help us deal with a miscarriage or with the fact we can't have children. He lives to help us face the death of a parent or a grandparent or a child. He lives to help us through the dark days of depression, the disturbing days of a hospitalization, the discouraging days of loneliness that face those who lose their husbands and wives. He lives to assure us that nothing-absolutely nothing-will be too big that He can't help us through it.

And finally, He lives to give us the greatest thing of all in our future - a bodily resurrection from the dead and eternal life with Him in heaven. No matter what our condition is in life, Christians can know this is true: *"The best is yet to come."* Jesus is **THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP**. Christ's resurrection means that my eternal future is sure and certain. Because He rose from the dead, you and I will rise from the dead. Jesus said, *"Because I live, you shall live also."* And that's not in some nebulous spirit world. That's not in some cosmic, impersonal existence. You and I are going to rise from the dead bodily. You and I are going to have glorified bodies, like Jesus had when He rose from the dead. The Bible says, *"Jesus shall change our mortal bodies, so that they are fashioned like unto His glorious body."* Because Jesus lives, that's what the future hold for us.

I'm glad to see you all here today. I hope to see you all here again soon. I hope to see you all here again often. I want to tell you again and again what Christ's resurrection means to me. I want you to tell me what Christ's resurrection means to you. Because it's true. It's true today, and it's true always: **CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP. AMEN.**