

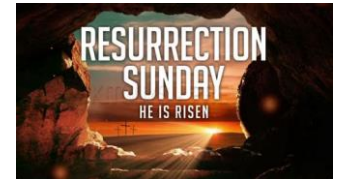
If the Tomb Could Talk!
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
April 17, 2022

Text: John 20:1-10

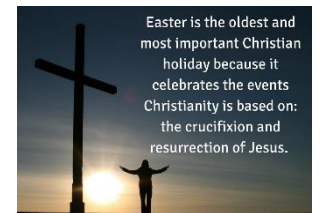
Purpose: Christ's words echo back to us almost 2000 years later. Words from the empty tomb shout loudly of God's "grace", "victory", "hope", and the command to "Go Tell."

Our text this morning is taken from the scene that happened almost 2000 years ago. On the first day of the week, on Sunday, the Lord was resurrected from the grave.

If you notice the word RESURRECTION is the theme for today. Many people use the word Easter to denote this time of year. The word "Easter" actually comes from the celebration of a pagan goddess during the spring time of the year. That is why I have titled this as Resurrection Sunday.



I have a friend that I met at Campbell that was a pastor in Eastern North Carolina. Several years ago, his wife answered the phone early one Easter Sunday and a woman needed some information. It seems earlier that year; the church had taken a "Welcome to the Community" basket to this woman. In it was information about the church. Since that visit, she did not come or attend the church. But this morning she needed some



information. She said, “I hate to call you this morning but I don’t know who else to call. I understand today is Easter, but I don’t have any idea what that means. Is it a religious holiday?” She had never been exposed to the story of Christ. She came to church that morning and afterwards said, “I have never in all my life heard this story about Jesus.” Isn’t that amazing!

The early church celebrated their Christian faith by observing a weekly calendar. Every Sunday was the celebration of Christ’s resurrection. On Friday they would observe a day of penance, fasting, and sorrow. But on Sunday, they would come together to remind themselves that on this day, Christ was victorious over death, hell and the grave. To them, every Sunday was Resurrection Sunday.

As time went on, the church decided to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus according to the lunar calendar. It was to coincide with the celebration of the Jewish holiday of Passover. Many think the season of Passover was just one holiday, when in fact it is three holidays combined.

From Thursday evening to Friday evening, Passover was celebrated. It was a memorial service to remind them of their night of being “Passed over” by the death angel while they were slaves in Egypt. Jesus met with his disciples in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover meal with them one last time. Later that evening and on into the early morning, Jesus was sentenced and then was crucified on Friday, the day of Passover. Jesus was our Passover sacrifice. We could stop there and explore all that that



signified – Jesus our Passover lamb, the lamb slain from the foundation of the world, surrendered his life for you and me.

There was also the holiday of the unleavened bread. When the children of Israel left Egypt, the Lord instructed them to take with them cakes of bread that had no leaven, or yeast in it. The next day, Saturday, is the beginning of a seven-day holiday of unleavened bread. Jesus laid in the grave from Friday around sunset to Sunday morning. That whole day Saturday, no corruption touched the body of Jesus. It is said that the body does not begin to decompose until the fourth day. Jesus was in there less than that. No corruption touched his body.

The day following the day of unleavened bread is the Festival of First Fruits. This lasted only one day. It was a celebration of the first fruits of the harvest. The beginning of the fruit of the field was brought forth as an offering unto God. What was Jesus? He was the first fruits of those that would be resurrected from the dead.

It is so amazing that God orchestrated these holidays in such a manner that points towards none other than Jesus. Resurrection Sunday, almost 2000 years ago, reminds us that the grave was empty. It is not a fairy tail. It REALLY happened.



I can’t help but wonder what the disciples thought that Easter morning when they came to that empty tomb. Maybe they were a little scared and excited all at the same time.

Today, on this Resurrection morning, we find ourselves at the entrance of the empty tomb of Jesus. Using our imagination, we too can look into the tomb of Jesus. As we peer deep into the tomb, we need to listen for any echoes coming back to us.

Now we all know that the tomb cannot verbally speak to us this morning. You will not hear an audible voice, but what the tomb is telling us is louder than a spoken voice. It is a testimony to anyone that is willing to stop and listen. Let us step into the entrance of the tomb and hear the four words for us this morning.

I. “Grace” – God’s Grace is Sufficient

The first word we hear echoing from the tomb is “grace.” It is interesting to note that Jesus never used the word “grace” in His teaching. Why? It is probably because He personified grace in the flesh.



GRACE

Jesus’ primary goal in life was not to make the world a better place to live, to provide us an example to follow, or provide us guidelines for effective living. Yes, His followers make the world a better place, He gave us great guidelines and instructions for living, and if we follow them, we will have a blessed life. Yes, Jesus did do all of these things, but the primary reason he came can be found in I Timothy 1:15. Paul wrote that *“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”*

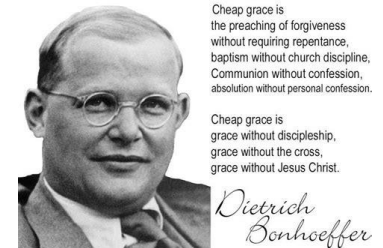
Grace has been defined as “unmerited favor.” Grace from God is a gift. It is not something that is deserved or merited. Because of this free gift, we are to express gratitude. We give thanks and praise to God because He forgave us. You do not express gratitude to win God’s favor. Christians express gratitude by praising and thanking God for His love and blessings.



The forgiveness we so desperately need cannot be earned; it can only be given. Nothing we receive from God depends upon anything we’ve done. The great evangelist D. L. Moody once said, “If men worked their way to heaven, they would turn it into hell by bragging about how they did it!” If you deserve God’s forgiveness, it wouldn’t be grace. NO amount of effort can “earn” forgiveness. Forgiveness must come freely and openly from the one who has been offended. It must flow freely from a gracious heart.

It is beyond our abilities to understand why God would love unworthy sinners. Yet, the resounding truth of Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us of God’s amazing love; *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”* Because salvation results from God’s grace, it is His perfect, complete gift.

I find it interesting the value people place on material things. Have you ever noticed how people will wait in long lines, often standing for hours, and will spend a considerable amount of money, to purchase a ticket that will allow them



to enter an event that will last only a few hours? After the event, the ticket is worthless, so they toss it on the ground and go on with life.

Many people treat God's plan of salvation in the same manner. They stop long enough to understand the basic idea behind Christianity, but toss what they have learned aside, and go on through life unchanged by the encounter with the truth of salvation. Sadly, many are indifferent in our culture to the reality of the resurrection and God's sufficient grace because they prefer a token faith. They don't want to deal with the resurrection as a historical reality; rather, they only want a superficial faith.

We must come face to face with that truth that Jesus rose from the grave and acknowledge Him as Lord and Redeemer. Failure to do so only reinforces your rejection of Him. It is a personal decision, and there is no place for half-hearted commitment. Every person must decide.

II. "Victory" – God's Victory is assured

A second word from the tomb I hear is "Victory." Jesus Christ was *"delivered up because of our transgressions and was raised for our justification."* (Romans 4:25) In this second message from the empty tomb, we learn that because God's redemptive plan is complete in Christ we no longer have to worry about the future.

If Jesus was not bodily resurrected, He was not God, He was not Savior, and Christianity is a lie. Regarding the



VICTORY

significance of the resurrection, Pastor Warren Wiersby writes, "A dead savior cannot save anybody. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is as much a part of the gospel message as His sacrificial death on the cross ... The resurrection proves that Jesus Christ is what He claimed to be, the very Son of God."



The resurrection is also evidence of the final victory for the believer. Those in Christ have victory over the final enemy, death. The empty tomb declares the resurrection hope we have in Jesus Christ. Jesus' victory over the grave empowers the believer to face the uncertainties of life with steadfast confidence. Paul pronounced the believer's hope when he said, *"For if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."* (Romans 14:8-9)

Often the greatest threat we face in life is the threat of the unknown. Fear can paralyze and control our lives much more than we realize. This fear can dictate what we eat, what activities we engage in, where we live, and how we relate to others. Christ has defeated our last enemy, death. We can begin to live our lives in light of the resurrection. Our victory is assured because of the empty grave.

God promises to provide the strength and resources necessary for victorious living. We can face the present with new confidence. We have the power of the Holy Spirit to give us the words to say when we are in difficult situations, to empower us when our knees buckle. We do

not face our present difficulties alone if we trust the One who has risen from the grave.

III. “Hope” – Hope for Tomorrow



A third word I can hear echoing from the empty grave is “Hope.”

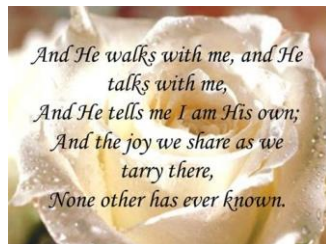
Of all the emotions that sustain life it is the word hope. If we have hope, we can endure most things in our lives. Even a little glimmer of hope can inspire us to do better, to work harder, endure hardship, tolerate abuse, put up with illness – as long as there is hope.

HOPE

If you have ever heard bad news from the doctor, you are listening carefully for those special words. “There is hope. I know of a treatment that can help you with this illness. I am treating someone that has the identical illness and they are alive and well.”

Jesus Christ is our hope for tomorrow. He is our hope for today. To live in Christ is a life filled to the brim with hope. Christ has said that He will never leave us or forsake us. The hymns we often sing express this truth better than I can say it.

“And He walks with me and talks with me.
And He tells me I am his own.
And the joy that we share, as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.”



Some people’s lives are filled with hopelessness. In 2020, 12.2 million people thought about suicide. In the United States in 2020, 45,979 died as a result of taking their own life. Some adults have struggled to make it through life and feel cheated and have lost hope. Some people have reached the breaking point in relationships or vocation stress, and they have lost hope.

I am here to tell you that suicide is not the answer. The world has sold people a lie telling them that hope can be found in the acquisition of things, possessions, status, drugs and alcohol. Yet the only hope our world really has can be found in that empty tomb. Jesus is no longer there. He is alive. Our hope is found in a risen Savior.

IV. “Go Tell” – God’s Message Must Be Shared



The last word I can hear from the empty tomb is “Go Tell.” In the gospel of Matthew, we read that the angel told the women at the tomb to

GO TELL!

“*go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead.*” (Matthew 28:7) Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples a simple mandate to “*go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.*” (Mark 16:15)

That word, preach, means to go and tell, to be a herald. Christianity is not a “sit in the pew” kind of faith, rather, it is to be a “go and tell” faith. Today we have the wonderful opportunity of proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ! It is true that you cannot go everywhere and share the gospel with others. But

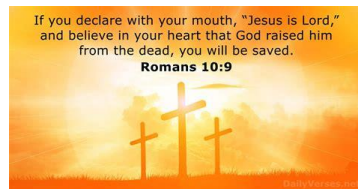


you can tell your neighbor. You can give to support foreign missions through Lottie Moon Christmas offering. You can support North American missions through the Annie Armstrong Easter offering. You can support the spreading of the good news by supporting the work of our church.

The important thing is that God wants YOU involved right where you are. He has an assignment for you.

We do not really love people if we withhold the most important information in the world from them. How can we stand silently by when we know there are so many who need to hear and receive the grace of Jesus Christ in their lives? How can we be comfortable when we realize that so many will spend eternity separated from God's love?

Today we have a wonderful opportunity to share the good news about Jesus Christ! The resurrection of Jesus proved that the sacrifice of His life was acceptable to God. His resurrection shows that the debt for sin has been paid. The resurrection promise is, *“that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”* (Romans 10:9)



Often the most profound truth is most effectively explained through the innocence of a child. That is certainly true regarding the story of 8-year-old Tommy. Though Tommy was mentally disabled, he always enjoyed going to his Sunday school class. Each week, he and the eight boys in the class



would gather in their room and listen as their teacher shared the wonderful stories of Jesus.

On the Sunday before Easter, the teacher gave each child an empty plastic egg and asked them to bring it back next week with something in it that reminded them of Easter.

On Easter Sunday morning, Tommy was excited to share his egg. One student after another opened their egg and talked about the object inside. One had a rock that reminded the child that the rock was rolled in front of the tomb. Another had a tiny flower that indicated newness of life. Another child had a butterfly in their plastic egg that showed the transformation from the cocoon.

When Tommy opened his egg, the teacher thought he misunderstood the assignment. She skipped him and moved to the next student. But Tommy insisted that he talk about his egg. She said, “But Tommy, your egg is empty.” He replied, “That’s right, my egg is empty to show me that the tomb is empty. Jesus is no longer dead, He is alive!”



If you do not know Jesus Christ as your Saviour, there is a special message, just for you, coming from the empty tomb. Listen, can you hear it? The message is of God's eternal love and eternal life that He is offering to you.

- God is extending “Grace” to you if you will accept it.
- God is shouting that there is “Victory” in an empty grave.
- He is letting us know that there is “Hope” for our future and eternity.
- Now we are called to “Go and Tell.”

Is the Holy Spirit urging you to respond to this offer of salvation? Do you need to make your decision public?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)



Jesus died on a cross, His body was broken and His blood shed for your sins. They placed His lifeless body in a tomb, but on the third day, that tomb could not contain Him. Right now, the resurrected Christ waits to forgive you of your sins. He waits to give you a new life. The victory of the resurrected Christ can be yours if you are willing to confess your sins and call on the name of Jesus. Everyone that does, shall be saved. I pray that you will listen to the message of the empty tomb and heed the call of God in your life today.

LET US PRAY