

Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008

Rodolfo Rodriguez

Mathew 28:1-28:10

Today is Easter Sunday. It is the Sunday that the Christian Church has set aside to commemorate and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is a very real sense in which we do that each Sunday of the year. And yet, there is one day each year on which we particularly remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So as Easter approached, our leadership met and decided, "You know, we want to get a really special speaker. Why don't we call the best preacher in La Paz and ask him to speak."

And they did and he said "No".

So they said, "Well if we can't have the best speaker, at least we can get the smartest one."

So they called him and he said "No".

And then they said, "Well, if we can't get the best or the smartest, at least we can get the best looking."

And they called him and he said "No".

And finally one of them said, "Well, we can always ask Rodolfo." And so they did. And what could I say? I had already told them "no" three times.

So you're stuck with me this morning. But I've got to tell you, we've got a great topic, a great passage of scripture, and a great hope in our resurrected Lord.

Let me tell you a little story:

A Sunday school teacher had just finished telling her group about how Jesus was crucified and placed in a tomb with a great stone sealing the opening. Then, wanting to share the excitement of the resurrection, she asked: "And what do you think were Jesus' first words when He came bursting out of that tomb alive?" A hand shot up into the air from the rear of the classroom. Attached to it was the arm of a little girl. Leaping out of her chair she shouted out excitedly "I know, I know!" "Good" said the teacher, "Tell us, what were Jesus first words." And Extending her arms high into the air she said: "TA-DA!"

The resurrected Lord is the central event of our faith. It's the "TA-DA!" of Christianity. And Because of Easter, we know that God in Christ Jesus is more powerful than anything in life, even death. The resurrection is not just another thing we believe as Christians; it is the very center of our faith.

Before we read our passage, I want to tell you that Larry and Bonnie made me rethink my speech as recently as Thursday with an interesting question: **Do Mexicans celebrate Good Friday more than Easter Sunday?**

Their question was based on the facts that Thursday and Friday are holidays in Mexico and that crucifixion representations take place every year. I can't go back 500 years to the Aztecs and Spanish priests who talk them into their beliefs to bring all the answers. At least not on an Easter Sunday. But I will share with you a little story that helped me understand the difference of the two approaches, Friday or Sunday.

It is a well-known incident in England. After the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815 all England was waiting for news about the outcome of the campaign. The Duke of Wellington had opposed Napoleon Bonaparte in this battle.

Of course, this was long before the telegraph, telephone, or television, so watchers were stationed along the coast to read the flag signals from the first returning sailing vessels. It was a cloudy, foggy day but, finally, one watcher spied a sailing vessel beginning to signal a message. The message read: "Wellington defeated," and then the fog closed in again.

This message was relayed all across England and the nation was gripped by discouragement and defeat.

Hours later, however, the fog lifted, and the entire message came through: "Wellington defeated the enemy!"

Discouragement was banished and the nation rejoiced in the good news.

This story perfectly illustrates the difference between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It also illustrates the state of mind of the disciples when Jesus died and when he resurrected. It should also put us in the right place and mood to celebrate today.

Today, we'll talk about three benefits of Jesus' resurrection.

- Forgiveness for past sins
- Power for present living
- Hope for future destiny

I will use several passages of the scripture but first let me read Matthew's account of the resurrection of Jesus. Please listen as I read **Matthew 28:1-10**:

1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning,

and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” (Matthew 28:1-10)

Let us look at the first of the three benefits of Jesus’ resurrection.

I. Forgiveness for Past Sins

The first benefit of Jesus’ resurrection is forgiveness for past sins.

As we think about the resurrection in relation to our sins, we must recognize that only because of the resurrection of Jesus can we have forgiveness for our past sins.

In ***Romans 4:25***, (Good News Translation) The Bible says that ***“because of our sins Jesus was handed over to die, and he was raised to life in order to put us right with God”***.

If we see Jesus as merely dying on the cross and being buried in the tomb, there is no hope and no forgiveness for us. It is his resurrection that gives us the assurance that Jesus has overcome death and won a great victory for his people. It is the resurrection that makes all the difference and puts us right with God.

In He said that he had come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10), and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

He said that he had come so that his people might have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

He said that whoever was thirsty—spiritually thirsty—could come to him and be refreshed (John 4:13-14; 6:35; 7:37).

He said that whoever would follow him would never walk in darkness, but would have the light of life (John 8:12).

He said that he had come to give eternal life to his people (John 10:28).

But then he was crucified.

It was a terrible day. At noon the sun suddenly disappeared and everything became frighteningly dark. There was an earthquake. Events took place that caused even the Roman centurion to exclaim, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54).

Then Jesus died and his body was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60). The message that rang out to all the world was: "Jesus defeated! Jesus defeated!" And all the disciples were gripped by discouragement and defeat.

But then, three days later on Easter Sunday morning, came the resurrection! Three days after Jesus was buried, he rose physically and bodily from the grave. Then the entire message came through: "Jesus defeated the enemy!" The discouragement of the disciples was banished and they rejoiced at the good news.

When Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, he paid the penalty for sin. When he died, he defeated Satan. On the cross he conquered our enemy.

The resurrection was God's stamp of approval. The resurrection was God saying, "Jesus, I accept your death as a substitute for guilty sinners."

The resurrection was God's vindication of Jesus' work.

And because of the resurrection of Jesus, we can be confident that Jesus paid the penalty for all the sin of his people. If there was one single sin not covered by the death of Jesus, if there was one single sin for which he did not die, then he would have never been raised from the dead; he would still be in tomb.

But his resurrection proves that his death covers every single sin.

And because of Jesus' resurrection, we can be confident that God forgives us all our sin.

Speaking of Jesus, the Bible says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

You know, there is no other way to heaven except through the risen Lord Jesus Christ. His death paid the penalty for sin. His resurrection proved that God accepted his death as a sufficient payment for sin. His resurrection guarantees that God will forgive us our sin when we sincerely and wholeheartedly cry out to him for forgiveness.

So, the first benefit of Jesus' resurrection is forgiveness for past sins. Our God has provided forgiveness; he had a perfect plan, which was executed in a perfect way by Jesus and works perfectly on his side. But, what about us? Let me tell you a short story.

A father and his teenage son were living in Mexico City. They had had an argument, and the son, Paco, shouted curses at his father and then stormed out of the house and didn't return. Days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months.

The father searched the city over and finally in desperation he went down to the newspaper and took out an ad. It said, "Paco, if you read this, I want you to know that all is forgiven. I love you and I will be waiting for you this Sunday at the entrance to the city park. I hope you show up, love dad."

That Sunday morning 200 Paco's showed up at the park, all looking for forgiveness.

Our Father in heaven has not only placed the ad, he has come to the world as man in Jesus Christ and has paid our ransom for each and every sin. We have a much better deal than Paco!

For our Father's perfect plan to work in our lives, we must show up at the park, recognize that we need it, repent to our sins and accept his ransom. We must want his forgiveness, we should be amazed with the greatness of his plan, like the woman at the well that went back to her town and said, "Come and see a man who knows all that I've done and yet still loves me."

The second benefit of Jesus' resurrection is power for present living.

II. Power for Present Living

The resurrection of Jesus not only guarantees forgiveness for past sins, it also guarantees power for present daily living. Because Jesus is a living Savior, he is a Savior who is able to empower us to live each day for him.

The apostle Paul said to the *Philippians*, "***I can do everything through him who gives me strength***" (4:13). Because of Jesus' resurrection the apostle Paul affirmed that he had power for daily living.

Years ago there was a missionary in the country of Turkey who was having great difficulty getting Muslims to understand why they should believe in Jesus Christ. One day he was traveling with some Muslims along a road that had no road signs. Eventually, they came to a fork in the road. Not having a map with them, they did not know which road to take to get to their destination. Right beside the road was a tomb of a Muslim "holy man."

While they were trying to decide which road to take, the missionary said, "Let's go over to the tomb and ask the 'holy man.'"

"But the man is dead!" his Muslim companions protested. "He cannot give us any information! See that house over there? Let's go there and ask someone who is alive!"

"You are quite right," said the missionary. "Never forget that Mohammed is dead. He can give you no help or information. In him there is no life. But Jesus Christ is alive, and he will not only give you eternal life if you will trust him as your Lord and Savior, but he will also empower you for daily living!"

Mohammed is buried, the graves of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are in Israel, King David's body is still in that grave but the grave of Jesus Christ is empty!

And because the tomb is empty, we can not only have forgiveness of sins, but also power to help us in our daily lives. Listen to how the author of the letter to the Hebrews put it:

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus is alive, and so he is able to help us in our time of need.

For example, last 2 days ago, on Good Friday, my wife Ana developed some kind of allergy, with a red skin, itching, etc. this combined with the fact that after almost 2 months from surgery we are still struggling with an open wound, partly due to the fact that she can't stay still and partly due to the fact that she has to be moving. Anyway, after we went to a picnic in Los Encinitos that Ana couldn't refuse, we ended up in the Doctor's office, which translated into a 4-day-bed-arrest, (including today, of course) more antibiotics, this two pre-teen kids full of energy trapped in an 840 square feet house, me trying to run said house while facing an Easter I couldn't cancel and didn't have much heart for.

But as I always say **"God is never wrong"** so this, indeed is the time and place of solemn preparation for the pinnacle of the church year—Easter Sunday.

So I said to myself, "First, Christ is Savior and rose from the grave," second "Rodolfo, you are not Christ. Jesus will help you to lead the celebration of Easter. Third, God will deliver his message with you, in spite of you or against you, so **decide wisely, pray fervently and act accordingly.**

I can tell you that Jesus did indeed strengthen me before and today. I can proclaim the Easter message "He is risen!"

Jesus' resurrection guarantees power for daily living. No matter what difficulty, no matter what trial, no matter what the hardship, Jesus empowers his people for daily living so that they can say with the apostle Paul, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13)..

And the great message of Easter is that if Jesus Christ was powerful enough to move the stone and overcome the grave, then he is powerful enough to move the stones that are blocking my life.

The resurrection gives us hope in the face of the unfairness of the world. It gives us strength and courage in every situation that we face. And we need that. You need it, I need it.

Finally, the third benefit of Jesus' resurrection is hope for future destiny.

III. Hope for Future Destiny

The resurrection guarantees forgiveness for past sins. It guarantees power for present living. And it also guarantees hope for our future destiny.

If Jesus was not raised from the dead, we would have no hope for the future. But because he is alive, we do have hope. We know that all that he said is true.

The apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, ***“By his power God raised Jesus from the dead, and he will raise us also” (1 Corinthians 6:14)***. What a magnificent promise that is! The same power that raised Jesus from the dead will one day raise believers back to life as well!

Jesus said to his disciples (in ***John 14:1-2***) just before he was crucified, ***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”***

Right now Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for every single Christian. He is preparing a place only for those who trust in him with a real, live, vital faith. And one day those of us who wholeheartedly believe in Jesus will die and go to him and live with him in heaven for all eternity.

Eric Barker was a missionary who spent many years in Portugal preaching the good news of the gospel, often under adverse conditions. During World War II, the situation became so critical that he was advised to send his wife and eight children back to England for their safety. His sister and her three children were also evacuated on the same ship. Although his family was forced to leave, he stayed behind to finish the work before going to join them in England.

On the Lord’s Day after their departure, the Rev. Barker stood before his congregation and said, “I have just received word that all my family arrived home safely!” Then, he proceeded with the worship service as usual.

It was not until after worship service was over that the full meaning of the Rev. Barker’s words became clear. You see, just before the worship service started he had received a telegram informing him that a submarine had torpedoed the ship on which his family was sailing, and everyone on board drowned.

Eric Barker knew that because everyone in his family had trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they had in fact arrived safely home—their heavenly home. And although he was overcome by grief, he knew that by God’s grace he had a sure hope of one day being reunited with his family.

This is the hope that the resurrection gives to those of us who know Jesus Christ personally as Lord and Savior. We will be raised back to life and we will find ourselves at home with Jesus in heaven for all eternity.

Conclusion.

There may be someone here today who does not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You know that your sins are not forgiven. Or you are not sure that they are forgiven. You know that Jesus is not real to you in your daily life. And you know that if you were to die today, you have no sure hope of going to heaven.

I say to you today that because of the resurrection of Jesus you can have your sins forgiven. You can know the power of Jesus in your daily life. And you can have a hope for your eternal destiny.

Today can be your spiritual birthday. When you receive forgiveness for your sin, power to live each day for Jesus, and a sure and certain hope that you will spend all eternity in heaven with him.

Let me share with you how you too can have what I and many others in this room have today. It is very simple.

First, you must acknowledge that you are a sinner. You must recognize that your sin has offended Almighty God. You must believe that it was your sin that sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross.

Second, you must believe that Jesus died to pay for your sin. You must believe that he paid the full penalty for all your sin. You must put your trust in Jesus alone for the gift of eternal life.

And third, you must confess your sin. You do this by asking God to forgive you of your sin. And you do it by repenting of your sin.

Lets pray, brothers and sisters.

Lord we thank you for each and every one of us being here today. We thank you for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for him defeating the enemy, sin and death. We come today before you, we confess our sins, we repent from our sins, we understand that Jesus Christ died in the cross in our place, and paid for each and every one of our sins. That he gives eternal live to all who believe in him as their Savior, by making them clean before you by his precious blood. We believe he is our Savior and ask for your forgiveness in his holy name. Please take control of our lives and lead us through the perfect path you have for each of us. Help us in sharing this great news of the new covenant in Jesus with the people around us, by example, living according to your will and by contagious enthusiasm and gratitude like the woman at the well that went back to her town and said, "Come and see a man who knows all that I've done and yet still loves me." In Jesus name we pray, amen