

One Life. What's It All About?

The Resurrection: Why Did Jesus Rise?

Mark 15:40-16:8

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Scripture

Today is the fifth week of a seven-week series of messages based on a book that is titled *Christianity Explored* by Rico Tice and Barry Cooper, out of England.

All of us know we are going to die – the only uncertainty is exactly when we will die. We are mortal, and each one of us will die. We all have a terminal disease. It's called "life," and its fatality rate is 100%.

The question I have for you is this: *How do you cope with the certainty of death?* And not just the certainty of your own death, but also the deaths of those people you love.

Ministers sometimes have difficult tasks. One of them is officiating at a funeral or standing at a graveside, and saying words like these from Psalm 103:15-16, "As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more."

But that's the truth. Our lives are brief, and however flourishing they have been, they soon come to an end.

This is a miserable start to a sermon, isn't it?

Now, Jesus was in his early thirties when he died. And yet here we are, two thousand years later, still discussing his life. You see, if Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would probably never even have heard of him. But his resurrection changes everything.

In January 2016 a movie is coming out that is called "Risen." The plot summary of the movie says that it "follows the epic Biblical story of the Resurrection, as told through the eyes of a non-believer. Clavius, a powerful Roman Military Tribune, and his aide Lucius, are tasked with solving the mystery of what happened to Jesus in the weeks following the crucifixion, in order to disprove the rumors of a risen Messiah and prevent an uprising in Jerusalem."² I recently saw a poster for

¹ The material for this message is from *Christianity Explored* by Rico Tice and Barry Cooper (New Malden, Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2002), 62-75.

² See http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3231054/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ov_pl.

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“Risen,” and I especially like the tagline on the poster. It reads, “Witness the manhunt that changed the course of human history.” The reason I like it is because Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection really did change the course of human history. His resurrection changes everything.

At the end of his account of Jesus’ death, Mark focuses on three women who have watched the whole gruesome ordeal. Please turn with me to Mark 15, and I will start to read from verse 40:

⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴² And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. ⁴⁵ And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. ⁴⁶ And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

^{16:1} When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back – it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you

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to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”⁸ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 15:40-16:8)

Lesson

Today's lesson is about Jesus' resurrection and its significance.

I would like to use the following outline:

1. The Shadow of Death (15:40-16:3)
2. The Shock of Discovery (16:4-8)
3. The Significance for the Disciples

I. The Shadow of Death (15:40-16:3)

So, first, let's note the shadow of death.

It was unusual for crucifixion to result in death so quickly. So in verse 44 the Roman governor Pontius Pilate queries the centurion – the same centurion who had stood only a short distance from the cross and watched the extraordinary way in which Jesus had died. The centurion confirms that Jesus had indeed already died.

The Romans had many talents, but when it came to killing people, they were experts. So the centurion's words would have been confirmation enough.

Having established that Jesus is dead, Pilate gives Joseph permission to remove the body from the cross.

Not only have the women watched Jesus die, but two of them also watch him being buried. Verse 47 says: **“Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.”** They, too, are witnesses of his death.

Now we come to Mark 16:1-3, three days later. The women return to the tomb that they had watched Jesus being buried in. It is important to keep in mind that they don't go hoping that Jesus might be alive; they go expecting to find a corpse. Things could not be more dismal – they are grieving and afraid because the young man they've

loved and served has been killed. Jesus' other followers are still in hiding. The women don't think they will be able to get to his body, because they know that a huge stone has been laid across the entrance to the tomb.

II. The Shock of Discovery (16:4-8)

And that brings us to our second point: the shock of discovery.

In Mark 16:4-8 the women are subjected to three shocks of escalating intensity.

The first shock comes in verse 4: **“And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back – it was very large.”** We are not told how large the stone was, but it was clearly large enough that the women know that they need help to move it. But there is no need for them to worry about the stone because divine power has dealt with it – although they don't know it at this point yet.

Then comes the second shock as they go inside the tomb. Look at verse 5: **“And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed.”** They see a man whose appearance is so striking that it causes the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb to shake. Matthew tells us that they become “like dead men.” The women, understandably, are alarmed. But they are not delusional – the man affirms the reality of what is happening in verse 6a: **“Do not be alarmed,”** he said. **“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.”** Yes, the man from Nazareth, the one you've been following these past three years, was killed. **“See the place where they laid him.”** He really was buried here; you don't have the wrong address. The fact is that Jesus simply isn't here anymore.

But the third shock will change the women's lives forever. It comes as the young man in the empty tomb tells them the reason why Jesus' body is not there. Verse 6b: **“He has risen!”** Just as there was no need for them to be worried about the stone, there is now no need for the spices they had brought to anoint the corpse. Divine power has not only rolled the stone away – it has also raised a body to life. This is supernatural. The tomb is empty because Jesus isn't dead anymore.

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He is alive!

So how do the women react to this staggering news? Verse 8 says: **“And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”**

Why are they afraid? Because they've forgotten what Jesus told them would happen. Look at the young man's words in verse 7: **“But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”** Jesus had told them repeatedly that he would suffer, die, and rise again. For example, we read in:

- Mark 8:31: “And he [i.e., Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, *and after three days rise again.*”
- Mark 9:31 Jesus said: “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, *after three days he will rise.*”
- Mark 10:34 Jesus said: “And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. *And after three days he will rise.*”

Jesus is always in control. He knows exactly how he will die, what will happen to him beyond death, and he explains everything to them before it happens. By now, the women should have learned to take Jesus at his word. But even at this point, they did not.

III. The Significance for the Disciples

That leads us to our third heading: the significance for the disciples.

The young man said that the disciples would see Jesus in Galilee. And that is precisely what happens. The disciples do see him and finally believe that Jesus has indeed risen from the dead. Well, most of them believe. All except one, in fact.

John records a wonderful incident in his Gospel about one of Jesus' disciples – a man called Thomas – who refuses to believe that

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Jesus has risen. The other disciples tell Thomas that they've seen Jesus. But Thomas knows that once people die, they don't come back to life again. He insists not only on seeing Jesus for himself, but also on touching him, as if to prove that this vision is not some kind of ghost or communal hallucination.

John 20:24-25 says, "Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.'"

So Thomas says, "Unless I touch his open wounds, I'm not going to believe it." And of course he wouldn't offer to go poking around in someone else's open wounds unless he was certain that it wasn't going to happen.

Let's carry on in John 20:26-28, "Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

What can Thomas say? The proof of Jesus' resurrection is standing right there in front of him. Stunned and amazed, but no longer disbelieving, he says: "My Lord and my God!"

Thirty years later, this stubborn, rational, incredulous man was to die a martyr's death testifying to what he had seen.

The resurrection turned a group of disciples cowering in fear for their lives into preachers of awesome courage.

The Gospels alone tell us of eleven separate instances where Jesus is seen after his death, at different times and in different places, to different people. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul tells us that over five hundred people saw Jesus at one time, many of whom were still living when Paul was writing. So Paul was saying to his readers, "If you don't believe me, go and talk to the eyewitnesses. They're still alive and will confirm the truth of what I'm saying."

The fact is that the resurrection really happened. People all over Israel saw Jesus alive again! The manhunt by the Romans to find the

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dead body of Jesus never could produce his body, because Jesus had risen from the dead and is alive, even to this very day! His resurrection changes everything.

Conclusion

So if the resurrection actually happened, what conclusions can we draw?

The first conclusion is that the resurrection gives us a great hope. Why? Because it means we can confidently put our trust in the person who said: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). The resurrection conclusively demonstrates Jesus' power and authority over death – not just over his own, but also over ours.

Some time ago a lady shared with me that when she was young she attended the funeral of a young man. At the funeral the pastor asked the congregation, "Are you sure that if you were to die today you would go to heaven?" This lady realized that she was not sure. The pastor went on to tell the congregation that even though the body of the young man was there, his spirit was in heaven because he was a Christian. He affirmed that the young man knew that Christ was risen, and so he knew what he had to look forward to beyond death.

First Thessalonians 4:14 explains that just as Christ died and rose again, so Christians, when they die, will also rise again, "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."

Revelation, the last book of the Bible, gives us a privileged glimpse of what heaven will be like. Look at Revelation 21:3-4, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

Think of the most mind-blowing experience you've ever had, the

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most intimate relationship you've ever shared, the deepest enchantment, or the most euphoric joy. Well, multiply that moment's intensity by infinity and its duration by eternity, and even then you will not be close to what it will feel like to being with Jesus Christ in heaven. "Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore." In other words, we won't have to put up with sin any more. At last, we will be free to enjoy all of the good things that God provides – eternally.

As it says in Revelation, God himself will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more regret, no more unfulfilled dreams, no more lost loved ones, no more fear, no more bitterness, no more broken hearts, no more loneliness, no more sin. And the Bible affirms that heaven is not a place where individuality is lost. Far from it. It's a physical place – as real as the one we're in now – where all our potential as individuals is finally fulfilled. This is not a pipe dream, or a cruel mirage, but an amazing reality earned for us by Christ's death, and proved by Christ's resurrection.

So, the resurrection gives us great hope.

The second conclusion is that the resurrection gives us a great warning.

Just as death was not the end for Jesus, so it won't be the end for us. Please turn to Acts 17:31. There we read that God "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man [i.e. Jesus] whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

At first the thought of a day of reckoning may appear very distressing – especially if, like me, you don't just fear for yourself but also for loved ones. But actually it's a very good thing indeed, and the alternative to judgment is absolutely appalling.

The book *Schindler's List* tells of an incident in Krakow, in Poland, during World War II, when the SS guards are moving Jews from their ghetto in the town to a concentration camp outside. Oscar Schindler, the hero of the story, sees a mother and her son brutally murdered by the guards. What shocks him most is that it all happened in full view of a young girl, about three years old, who stood out because she was dressed in red. The author writes,

Later in the day after he had absorbed a ration of brandy, Oscar

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understood the proposition in its clearest terms: they permitted witnesses, such witnesses as the red toddler, because they believed all the witnesses would perish too.³

Do you see the implication of that? The Nazi guards did what they liked because they thought they would never have to give an account of their actions. As far as the guards were concerned, there would be no day of reckoning, no accounting, no judgment for what they'd done. They could do whatever they liked and nothing mattered. Because all those with the power to condemn them would be dead.

But death is not the end. Thankfully, the Bible repeatedly assures us that wrongdoing will not be left unaddressed – ultimately there will be justice. The Bible is very blunt and clear about this. The book of Hebrews, for example, says this in Hebrews 9:27, “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

It's a sobering thought, but the alternative is much more terrifying. Do any of us really want to live in a world where nothing matters, where even the most extreme cruelty is met with vacuous silence? But justice will be done, every sin will be paid for – that is the promise of the resurrection. There is a place called hell – it is a place of isolation, punishment and torment. It is a place where we pay for our sin ourselves.

Paul preached that message to the people of Athens. He told them that, ultimately, God will judge everyone, and “and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Obviously, no-one likes being told about judgment, so how do these people react?

Look at Acts 17:32-34, “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.”

So some of them sneered, and some wanted to hear more on the subject. We also read that some believed.

³ Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's List* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 143.

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What is your reaction to the resurrection?

Acts 17:31 says that God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” And who is this “appointed” man? The resurrection confirms the answer. It is God’s only Son, a man who knows all about Thomas’s doubts before he even speaks, a man who knows all about us and yet still gave up his life for us.

Let me urge you to believe in the risen Jesus. And when you do, he will raise you up at the last day to be with him in heaven for all eternity. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
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PRAYER:

Father, thank you for raising Jesus Christ from the dead. His resurrection is proof to us that you accepted his payment for sin. And so we can have confidence that we can believe that Jesus paid the penalty for our sin on the cross.

If there is anyone here today who has not yet believed in Jesus, would you grant that person the gift of faith.

And for those of us who do believe in Jesus, would you strengthen us in our faith.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!