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Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

The Irrefutable Testimony of the Empty Tomb

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Children, you are dismissed now for your classes. May the glory of the risen Lord be made known to each of you this day. The title of the message this morning is ‘The Irrefutable Testimony of the Empty Tomb’. We are going to be starting in Romans 1, so you can turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 1. We’ll be moving around throughout the New Testament.

One of the questions that faces us, particularly in this day, as we see just the occurrence of culture, the changing times in which we all live, Patti and I were driving just down a road. I’ve lived in, we’ve lived in this area, Patti was born and raised in Duluth, and I was raised most of my life in Duluth. I was driving to the high school, I went to Duluth High School, so driving from my house to Duluth High School, we rode the same road every day, every day, every day, year, after year, after year. We were driving down that same road, Duluth Highway 120, and we were just driving along last night, and we saw the lights on that new building there. I forget what it is, some kind of temple. Very different, there wasn’t one of those in the 1970s or 80s in Duluth. It hit me, as I’ve talked with a number of you even recently, who talked about, “Have you seen the big Hindu temple?” or, “We went to this, we saw this mosque.” You see this amazing influx of all of the religions of the world have come in around us. It is not something that should discourage us, it should be a joy because it is a great opportunity.

We have the opportunity to make known the supreme glory of Jesus Christ to people, many of whom have really never heard. The Lord has brought the mission field to us. But one of the questions that faces us is that though we have clear direction in the New Testament, we feel the pressure of this world against us articulating a clear witness, a confident witness. The question—In a pluralistic society, what justification can Christians offer for saying that Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven? We live in a society in which people believe there are many ways. ‘*Pluralism*’, that is the definition of it, the idea that no one way is better than the other. Political correctness says that the one thing that you can’t claim to be is certain. You are to allow everyone their own idea of truth. We certainly allow everyone their own idea of truth, but they want us to agree that their idea is just as good as ours in our hearts. That is not tolerance, that is actually intolerant oppression.

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So one of the questions then is how do you offer with certainty the message of the Gospel in a confident way to people who are confident that their own way is right? On what basis do you have at the water cooler at work to say that, “I have found the way to God.”? The answer to that, that the New Testament would give, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The reason that you and I can say with certainty that Jesus is the only way to God is that He, and He alone, has risen. The passage we are going to look at, Romans 1:1-4, will be our point of departure this morning. We read there:

Romans 1:1-4 ~ Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that the same Spirit of Holiness, that was at work in the ministry of our great Savior, would now minister among us. That He might open our eyes, that we might see Jesus, and see Him in all of His power, and all of His glory. And we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is what definitively declares Him to be the Son of God. That is what Paul is saying in Verse 4, that Jesus, the good news is He, ***...who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead,...*** He was declared to be the Son of God, with power, by the resurrection. That is, the bodily resurrection of Jesus is what definitively declares Him to be the Son of God. The empty tomb is what shouts to the world that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son.

The word 'declared', there in Verse 4, is an important word. The Greek word is 'horízō', which means 'to separate, to set a definitive boundary, to mark out a clear line of demarcation'. So the word 'declared', it is actually the active part of the verb means 'to separate, to distinguish'. The word 'horízō' we transliterate into our English word 'horizon'. It comes from that same word. But the horizon is the boundary line that separates Heaven and Earth. When you look off into the distance, the horizon is that demarcation, the line of separation. Paul is saying that the line of separation that demarcates the one who came from above from

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everybody else, is the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ‘*horízō*’, it is the horizon, it is what separates Him from Confucius, Buddha, Mohammad, any other rival who claims to have authority.

So in a pluralistic society, we are to show tolerance and love for all people regardless of their views, but love from a Christian viewpoint is to tell them the truth. It would be like you finding the cure for cancer, and other people think that they are doing okay with their chemo, and you don’t want to offend them by sharing the cure for cancer. That is not love, that is a cowardly, self-centered, mockery of God. We should love God, and love people enough to speak the truth.

Now, what we are going to consider this morning, as we continue to look at ‘The Irrefutable Testimony of the Resurrection of Jesus’, and that is how God separates Him from every other person, every other one who claims authority. We are going to look at two main points. We are going to spend a lot of time on the second point, but the two points are: *The Fact of the Resurrection* and *The Force of the Resurrection*. First of all, *The Fact of the Resurrection*.

1) The Fact of the Resurrection:

I read an article by William Lane Craig, a noted apologist, Christian, philosopher, who spends a lot of time dealing with debates with atheists, or other world views, and he writes in an article on the resurrection of Jesus. He says this:

So how do we know that Jesus is risen from the dead? The Easter hymn-writer says: ‘You ask me how I know He lives; He lives within my heart.’ This answer is perfectly appropriate on an individual level, but when Christians engage unbelievers, and the public square, such as in Letters to the Editor of a local newspaper, on call-in programs on talk radio, at PTA meetings, or just in conversation with co-workers, then it is crucial that we be able to present objective evidence in support of our beliefs. Otherwise our claims hold no more water than the assertions of anyone else claiming to have a private experience with God. Fortunately, Christianity is a religion rooted in history, and it makes claims that can, in important measure, be investigated historically. Suppose then that we approach the New Testament writings...

Now he is just saying this for the purpose of the article, I’m not proposing this, but work with me on this. He says:

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Just suppose we approach the New Testament writings not as inspired Scripture, but merely as a collection of Greek documents coming down to us out of the 1st Century. Without any assumption as to their reliability, other than the way we normally regard other sources of ancient history.

Do you see what he is saying? If we just treated the New Testament documents like any other documents in history, and we applied the canons of research to them, he said, “What would we find?” That is what Craig is saying. He says:

We may be surprised to learn that the majority of New Testament critics, investigating the Gospels in this way, accept the central facts undergirding the resurrection of Jesus, even those who don't believe.

They accept the certain facts that we believe undergird the resurrection. He said:

I want to emphasize, I'm not talking about evangelical or conservative scholars only, but about the broad spectrum of New Testament critics who teach at secular universities, and non-evangelical seminaries. Amazing as it may seem, most of them have come to regard as historical the basic facts to which support the resurrection of Jesus.

Craig goes on to write about these four basic facts that are basically universally accepted. You know you hear stuff like Jesus wasn't even a real man. That is just nonsense! It is historically laughable that people would believe that. The facts, the canons of historical research, of course, show there was a Jesus. When you look at Roman documents, Greek documents, there is no doubt about it. But here are the four facts he's going to add. He says:

This is what all historians recognize, after His crucifixion, Jesus was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea.

He points this out because we know where Jesus was buried, and people at the time of His resurrection knew where He was buried. In fact, it was written down in the Gospel of Mark in 53 A.D., that He was buried in this tomb. It was codified and preached throughout the world, so we know that. That's the first fact. These are four sub-points under *The Fact of the Resurrection*. First fact, He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

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The second fact, on the Sunday following the crucifixion, Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of female followers. He points out, this is universally accepted, and one of the reasons that it argues for the historicity of the resurrection is, if you were making up a story about this in the 1st Century, you would have never said women found Him. That was stupid because women couldn't even, Josephus tells us, couldn't even testify legally in court. So the very fact that the New Testament says that is because that is what happened. They weren't trying to craft a story; they were telling how it happened. Now we also learned that it was ridiculous in the 1st Century that women can testify, but the Gospel liberates, and changes that.

Third fact, not just the burial place being known, and not just the fact that women found the burial place empty, thirdly, on multiple occasions, and under varied circumstances, different individuals and groups of people, experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead. We have clear testimonies that people claimed to have seen Him, numbers of them. In fact, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15, where the apostle Paul summarizes the Gospel, and he explains that Jesus rose from the dead according to the Scriptures in Verse 4.

1 Corinthians 15:4-6 ~ ...and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, (look what Paul writes) most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;

He is also writing in 53 A.D. Now, we don't know for sure what year Jesus was crucified and resurrected. I tend to think, I tend to agree with those scholars that think it was 33 A.D. Based on the calendars, we think it was 30 or 33. I believe it was 33 A.D., so that would be 20 years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Paul writes and says, "Listen, He appeared to 500 brethren at one time." If the opponents of the Gospel, who were so strident against the message of Christianity, they could have produced Joseph of Arimathea to say, "Hey, no, He wasn't buried in my tomb." They could have stamped out the message, but you could actually find people who could say, "I saw Him." Twenty years, that's not very long.

You know, I've got some news for you. Maybe, I think probably everyone knows this here. Maybe some of 10 or 11-year-olds don't know it, the Olympics was once in Atlanta. Can you believe that? It's true! In 1996, the world came to Atlanta. I mean, we don't win very much. You know, we did win the World Series right

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before that. It was probably what got us the Olympics. Atlanta is kind of known as one of Losersville, just a step above Cleveland. Forgive me if you are from Cleveland, but you know, I'm putting us down here too. So, that we beat Cleveland in the World Series in '95. Okay, anyway, in '96 the Olympics was here. I can tell you I went to the Olympics. I can tell you about the 200 meters that I saw Michael Johnson run. You may think it is a myth. No, I can tell you. I was there. When Paul wrote the words that you just read, there were people that could say that. "I saw Him." It is a fact of history. So that third fact, that people acknowledge, even the skeptics, who don't believe He was resurrected, acknowledge that clearly people claim to have seen Him. That is unmistakable. The claim, they have to explain it away some other way.

The fourth fact, the original disciples believe that Jesus was risen from the dead despite their having every predisposition to the contrary. I mean, we know they were not the most courageous, and then when you realize that being Jews, Jesus is being tried basically as a blasphemer because He claimed to be God, and the Jews said He wasn't, so He was guilty of blasphemy. He hung on a cross, and if He died on the cross, and was not resurrected, it would seem to any reasonable Jewish person, that the claims of the Jewish authorities were right—Jesus was a blasphemer, and therefore He was cursed by God at Calvary. Do you see that? If He was not risen, why would Peter, and James, and John go out telling the world about Jesus? They wouldn't.

If you put these things together, and the only theory that makes sense of this is what the New Testament proclaims to be a fact—He is risen. It is a historical fact. History is filled with skeptics who have looked at the evidence. Who have looked at the evidence, and concluded, after looking at the evidence, even if they started out to disprove the Gospel, like Josh McDowell in the last century who did the same thing. He set out as a lawyer to disprove the resurrection, and in looking at the evidence, he followed in the footsteps of that first skeptic, Doubting Thomas. Remember Thomas? The testimony of the other ten? And he said, "Unless I place my hand, my finger, in the scars on His hands, unless I reach my hand into His side I will not believe," and so Jesus appeared to Thomas and said, "Thomas, place your finger in My hands. Place your hand in My side, and be not unbelieving, but believing." And what did that first skeptic say? What so many have said through the centuries, "My Lord and my God." The Gospel of Jesus Christ can stand up to scrutiny because it is true. It is rooted in history. It is not some idle idea that is made up in the minds of men, it is the truth from God. That is the fact of the resurrection.

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2) The Force of the Resurrection:

Secondly, *The Force of the Resurrection*. The factual testimony speaks to us with irrefutable force in the force of the testimony. There are basically three things that I want to focus under *The Force of the Resurrection*. It's the second point, *The Force of the Resurrection*, three sub-points. In a word, what we saw earlier is the resurrection separates, it sets a boundary between Jesus and everyone else, the horizon. How does it do that? The New Testament shows us a number of ways, and I want us to consider three.

A) Validates All of Jesus' Claims:

First, the resurrection validates all of Jesus' claims. This is the force of the resurrection. You see, the resurrection validates His claims. The man Jesus of Nazareth made remarkable claims. In fact, some would say audacious claims. He claimed to have a special unique relationship with God. He spoke of God as His Father, and of Himself not as *a* Son, but as *the* Son. He refers to Himself in John 3:16, the Father loved the world, and gave His '*one and only Son*'. He said things like this in Matthew 11:27, that no one knows the Father except the Son, and whomever the Son chooses to reveal Him to. John 14:6, He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, but by Me. There is no other way." Jesus was clear and emphatic. He not only claimed to have a special relationship with God, to be the only way to God, He claimed to *be* God. He says in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am," and the Jews hearing that knew that He was claiming to be eternal, He was claiming to be God. They picked up stones to stone Him. This is why He was basically tried by them for the crime of blasphemy. They could find no other charge, there was no sin in His life, but they claimed He was a blasphemer because He claimed to be God. The problem was, they didn't really consider the fact that His claim could be true. Turn with me John 2, and show how the resurrection validates His claims to authority.

Things that appear to be an audacious act, and in a sense it really was an audacious claim, but it was actually an accurate claim. But at first glance, if you put yourself in the place of the Jewish chief priests, who were over the temple. In John 2:13-22, we are told that at the Passover, Jesus goes up to the temple and He makes a scourge of cords, and He just basically wreaks havoc at the temple. He drives out the moneychangers. He says, "Take these things away. Stop making My Father's house a business, a place of business." The Jews say to Him in Verse 18:

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John 2:18 ~ ...“What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?”

“Hey, wait a minute. Who do You think You are? Give us a reason to accept Your authority for coming in.” I mean, here He is, He is a Galilean, He’s not a Levite, He’s from the Tribe of Judah. “What business do you have coming in here running the temple? You are not a priest.” Jesus answers, “Here is the basis of My authority. You want to know how you can know My authority?”

John 2:19-22 ~ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 The Jews then said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

They were sitting there with Jesus, probably just dumbfounded as it was all happening anyway. It wasn’t like He gave them all a game plan, “We’re going to go in there, and we’re going to turn over the tables.” They walk with Him, and Jesus basically, with the zeal of the Lord upon Him, He does this, and the disciples are sitting there probably scratching their heads wondering, “What in the world just happened?” They hear the Pharisees say, “By what authority do you do this?” They are probably waiting, saying, “Yeah, by what authority do You do that?” Then He makes this interesting statement, “Destroy this temple and in three days I’ll raise it.” They didn’t understand what He was talking about. They probably thought the same thing, “This temple did take a long time. I remember when they were building it, this section over here.” But they didn’t realize that the temple of God was now the man Christ Jesus. John says that in John 1:14.

John 1:14 ~ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,...

And the word for ‘dwelt’ is ‘pitched His tent’, or ‘tabernacled’. The tabernacle was the precursor to the temple, the place where God’s glory dwells. Tabernacle, temple, the body of Jesus is the tabernacle. So He says, “When I’m resurrected, you will see My authority.” It validates all of His claims. He said that He came to seek and to save that which was lost. All of that is validated in His resurrection. So the resurrection validates His claims to be the only way to God, the only one who speaks for God.

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Many people claim to speak for God. As I mentioned earlier, Confucius, Mohammad, Buddha, various Hindu writings, all kinds of supposed authorities, but Jesus says, “I and I alone am the way to God. I and I alone am the one who has come down from Heaven to reveal God.” His resurrection validates that exclusive claim. Now, the force of the resurrection is seen first of all in that the resurrection validates His claims. We just covered that. Secondly, the resurrection authenticates His ministry.

B) The Resurrection Authenticates His Ministry:

The New Testament shows us this in a number of places. First in Hebrews 7:16. Here the author of Hebrews is showing how Jesus was a Priest from the order of Melchizedek, not from the order of Levi. He goes all the way back into Genesis to say He follows in the footsteps of Melchizedek, who was introduced in Genesis 14, who was a priest-king. Melchizedek, the king of Salem, was a priest of God most high, and he was a type of the Priest-King that would come, Jesus. And so the author of Hebrews is showing that the king and the priest are one and the same, that God’s Messiah has come as His High Priest, and His High Priest has made an offering that is acceptable to God. And what does the priest do? What’s the function? A king rules, a prophet speaks, but what does a priest do? A priest mediates. A priest brings men to God. He stands between. And so the author of Hebrews is saying that Jesus’ ministry, His priestly ministry, is authenticated by the resurrection, because he says in Verse 16:

Hebrews 7:16 ~ who has become such...

That is, a priest according to the likeness of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:16 ~ who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement,...

Not on the fact that He came from a certain line.

...but according to the power of an indestructible life.

The reason that Jesus is seen to be the High Priest who truly brings us back to God is by virtue of His indestructible life.

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Ted shared something a couple weeks ago as he was leading worship. Before one of the songs, he mentioned that the high priest in the Old Covenant, that came from the line of Aaron and Levi, that he would go into the Holy of Holies once a year on the day of atonement, and he would carry the blood of the sacrificial goat into the Holy of Holies and make atonement for the people, and he would come out from there, and the people would now know that they were clean for a year. Their sins had been temporarily overlooked by God because of the propitiation of that goat, but it would have to be offered again the next year. So the high priest would go in and then he would come out. And what Ted brought up was that one of the Puritans said, “Jesus is the High Priest that when He went in to offer His blood, He opened the way and He invited us into the Holy of Holies.” His ministry was truly effectual and we know it, the author of Hebrews says, by virtue of an indestructible life. How do you know that you can enter into the presence of God? How do you know? Because He is risen. That’s how you know. If He were still in the tomb, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, “Our faith would be worthless. We would still be in our sins.” But the fact that He’s not in the tomb means our faith is not worthless and we’re not still in our sins. Or as Paul says in Romans 4:25, “He was delivered up for our transgressions. He was raised again for our justification.” It’s the resurrection that proves you’re righteous with God. You see, it’s the resurrection that proves, that validates, His ministry.

It’s the resurrection for a number of reasons. Let me just elaborate on this for a moment. When you look at the Old Covenant and the regulations, the high priest had to be pure. He had to be washed. He had to have a sacrifice for himself. He had to put on certain garments. He had to be clean. Though the high priest was never fully clean, he had to experience ceremonial cleansing. Jesus was the High Priest who went in, though He was tempted in every way, He was without sin. He was spotless as the High Priest. But it wasn’t just the priest that had to be clean. It was the offering that had to be clean. In the Jewish temple system, when someone would bring an animal for sacrifice, when the priests were doing their jobs rightly, they would check the animal to see if it was spotted or blemished, to see if it was deformed in some way. Was it acceptable? Was it an animal without spot or blemish? They would check it when they brought it in, and sometimes there would be a delay of time. These animals are given, and maybe this is going to be used for this evening’s sacrifice. And before the evening sacrifice, there would be one priest there that was ready to offer the sacrifice, there would be one priest who would lead the lamb from the holding place to the sacrifice, and there would be another priest who would right before it was sacrificed, examine him again. Is he still unblemished?

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The message of the Gospels and the message of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ was examined in that way and He was, as Peter himself said in 1 Peter 1:22, “You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your former manner of life inherited from your forefathers, but with blood of a lamb without spot or blemish.” Peter says He was unblemished. He was, as John says, Jesus Christ the righteous, perfect in righteousness. The priest would examine him right before the sacrifice. I think John is doing something of that, and God was doing something of that. When we were working through John’s Gospel, we noticed that Pontius Pilate examined Jesus. Jesus was tried right before He was offered, and three times Pontius Pilate says in John 18:38, John 19:4, and John 19:6, “I find no fault in Him.” Three times right before He is sacrificed.

Now, that’s a powerful testimony because that is the representative of Rome. The country that rules over the world examined the Messiah, examined the Lamb of God, and said, “I find no fault in Him. I find no blemish in Him. I find no blemish in Him. I find no blemish in Him,” and He’s sent away to the offering. That’s a powerful testimony, but there’s a greater testimony than that, and that is the fact that the tomb is empty. That is the testimony that He was without spot or blemish.

This is what the apostle Peter basically is saying. He’s the one who said He was a lamb without spot or blemish in 1 Peter 1. In Acts 2:24, that sermon at Pentecost, he says to the Jews gathered there, “You nailed Him to a cross, but God raised Him from the dead, putting an end to the agony of death since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” It was impossible for Jesus to be held in its power. You see, death is the wage of sin. It is the just and inescapable wage, payment for sin. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:56 that the sting of death is sin. That’s an interesting word he uses for *sting* in 1 Corinthians 15:56. It’s a word which means to pierce. What is it that gives death its piercing power? What is it that death can use to gain a hold? It is sin.

And so when Jesus, bearing our sins on the cross, having as Paul says, become sin on the cross, experiences the wrath of God, He says those wonderful words, “It is finished!” It’s paid in full and then He dies. He’s paid for all of the sins of the world as He hung on the cross, and now He announces that. “It’s finished!” He dies, and He enters into death. And the reason death could not hold him was because death had no sting in Jesus. He was perfectly righteous and He just waited. He didn’t have to wait at all, but God had Him wait from Friday until Sunday. He ascended to Heaven and He’s with the Father, but His body waited in the tomb until Sunday so that everyone would know that without a doubt He was dead, and

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then everyone could see that He was alive. It was a matter of waiting long enough for that to be clear, and then He said, “Son, arise,” and Jesus walked out of death. And because He did, death, as Peter said in that sermon, He put an end to the agony of death for all of us.

So His ministry was authenticated by His resurrection. Our confidence in knowing that no matter how much we’ve sinned, no matter how badly we’ve failed, your confidence in standing before God righteous and holy is not in anything in yourself. It is in the work of your High Priest. It is in the power of His blood. “And how do you know that His blood can really wash me?” you say. “How can I really be clean? I don’t feel that I’m clean.” Believe the Gospel. Believe that He died in the place of everyone who would ever believe, that He took your sins at Calvary and then trust and reckon on the fact that God accepted it. We wonder, “How could a holy God accept me?” God accepts you because God raised Jesus. God validated, authenticated His ministry. His claims were validated. His ministry was authenticated. And the third thing that the resurrection does is it vindicates His authority.

C) The Resurrection Vindicates His Authority:

We said Romans 1:4 says He was declared to be the Son of God. That’s where we started today, the *horízō*. He was demarcated, separated. The word *Son of God* speaks in two ways in that passage. It speaks of His deity, that He’s the one from Heaven, but it also speaks in the Hebrew understanding in the Old Testament background that the Son of God was a technical term for the King, for the Messiah. That’s why when Peter says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” is another way of saying the same thing. I think Peter was beginning to understand Jesus’ deity, but he wasn’t fully aware of that, but he was fully aware that He was the King. So His resurrection then sets Him out to have authority, to have the right to rule. He is the Messiah. He is the King. We saw earlier in Psalm 110 that we read earlier in the service, the Father says, “Sit at My right hand,” that the resurrection was the beginning of that, Him saying, “You reign. It’s now Your time to reign.”

Turn with me to Revelation 1. We live in a world which is becoming increasingly hostile to us, isn’t it? A pluralistic society that is offended if you claim to believe in absolute truth. As insane as that is, it’s become the dominant way of thinking, and we live in a world in which it appears that might makes right, that evil reigns. And so that can make us timid, but we should be confident. We should be loving. We

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should be gentle. We should be humble. We should be people who serve others, who don't look down on them in the sense of thinking that we're better than them, because all of us are equally guilty before God, but we are the ones who have found life. We should be like one beggar telling another beggar, as Martin Luther said, one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread. That's what it is to preach the Gospel, but if you've really found bread and you know that somebody's hungry, and you know where bread is, you should have confidence when you tell them where to find bread. "Hey, I know that you may be offended. You may not want me to tell you where the bread is." I know it's not really appropriate for us to act like, "I certainly know where the bread is," and all of this, "because maybe you like the invisible bread you're eating, and that's okay." That's the kind of nonsense of how people communicate today. "You're hungry. I was hungry. I found bread. This is where you find it." That's the message. "You're a sinner. I'm a sinner. We were dead. You need God. I found God in Jesus Christ." "Well, that's good for you." "No, it's the only way to find God. I tried other ways." "How can you be so audacious to make that claim?" "I know it's hard to understand this, but think about this. All of the claims that people make for truth, there's only one who can say, 'He is risen.'" That's the reason. And so humbly but confidently we proclaim Christ and we offer Him to men as the way to be reconciled to God.

Revelation 1, this book is written to people who are about to go through tremendous persecution, and then it helps us to know how to go through persecution. We would be timid, but John was girded, and his vision of Christ was to help undergird the people he wrote to, including us, because it doesn't look like He's reigning. It doesn't look like He's in charge, but the resurrection proves He is reigning. It proves He's in charge. When he sees the resurrected Christ in Verse 17, "When I saw Him," he saw the glory of Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, "I fell at His feet like a dead man."

Revelation 1:17 ~ And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that proves He has the keys. He has all authority. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and it doesn't matter what the appearances to the contrary say. He alone is the way of salvation. One of my favorite stories is the story—when we began the worship service, Ted opened it with, "He is risen!" and we responded, "He is risen indeed!" That's a liturgical

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element that goes way back in church history. No one knows exactly when it began to be used. It's taken from Luke's Gospel where the angel says, "He is risen indeed!" But it's something that has been a part of faithful worship all across the world by those who believe in Jesus Christ as the only way to God. The story is told after the Communist takeover of Russia, the Soviet Union has been formed. In the early days of the Soviet Union they sent commissars out into the countryside to educate the masses, to educate the ignorant to the newfound liberation that was coming through atheistic Communism, to liberate them from their foolishness of believing in God, and to realize that now they needed to believe in the state. And so commissars went out all over the countryside, and they would go and they would teach and educate. And so at one place in rural Russia, the commissar comes in. They were forced and compelled to come in, so they fill a church building. That was the largest building in town, and they filled the church building, and the commissar goes on for two or three hours explaining how the philosophy of atheism and Communism is really the authority, and you can see by what has happened that you're being liberated from Christianity. It's outdated. It's defunct. It is superstition that needs to be jettisoned.

After the people endured two hours of this man, this enlightened man going on and on, he finished, and he said, "Does anyone have anything to say?" The story is told that an elderly Russian minister from the Orthodox church got up, walked to the front of the church, slow to the front of the church, stood in the front of the church not in the pulpit but just stood on the floor and said three words. "He is risen!" And the story is told that the crowd as one man rose to their feet and said, "He is risen indeed!" That is all that needed to be said. He is risen. That powerful truth has transformed lives. It has transformed cultures, and it will transform this fallen world into the glorious place that it will one day be. Let us not hesitate to lift up that truth. He is risen. He is King of kings. He is Lord of lords. But Acts 17 also says that He is judge. The resurrection proves that He's not only King in His authority, but He's also judge. Acts 17:32 says that God is going to judge the world in righteousness through the man He appointed. Paul preached this in Athens, Greece. He's going to judge the world in righteousness through the man He appointed. That word *appointed* is the same word *horizō*. He's appointed the judge. He's demarcated Him from everyone else. He's the judge, and Paul says He appointed, and He's given proof of this by raising Him from the dead. It is the resurrection that testifies to His authority, and therefore the message that is incumbent upon all of us, the response is, this irrefutable testimony of the resurrection, have you considered it? Have you responded appropriately to it? For He is not only King of kings and Lord of lords, but He is the one who will judge,

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and the urgency is to bow the knee and to give Him the honor that He's due. Kiss the Son lest He become angry and you perish in the way, Psalm 2 says. But oh how happy is the one who takes refuge in Him. You must honor Him. You must submit, but oh how happy are you when you submit. May God help us do that, and for those who already have, may we be confident and joyful in proclaiming His glory.

Let's pray together...

Our Father, we stand in awe of Your glorious plan of salvation. We stand in awe of Your glorious Son. He is worthy. Lord, He is worthy to receive all praise, and adoration, and honor, for He offered Himself as a sacrifice. He was alive, He died, and He's alive forever more. Help each one in this room to deal honestly and truthfully with their own souls before You. Grant grace of repentance and faith. All the arguments that argue against surrendering and submitting, expose them as total foolishness in the face of the supreme glory of Jesus of Nazareth. Lord, grant eyes that see and ears that hear. You are mighty to save, and You proved it in the resurrection. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

"The Irrefutable Testimony of the Empty Tomb"

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