

April 16, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Easter
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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DEAD FAITH – LIVING FAITH
1 Corinthians 15:12-19

On my first trip to Israel, I remember standing in the place called “The Garden Tomb.” Most professed believers have seen pictures of the place. As I stood there in the quiet, peaceful garden, I thought that this was the kind of place where Jesus should have been buried. It was tranquil, the birds were singing, it was a balmy spring day. But then there were the people.

One group present that day was made up of some highly energetic middle-aged women. One by one they made their way into the tomb and then after a bit they would exit, hands raised in the air, shouting, “Glory to God! The tomb is empty!” I mused as I observed this confident praise, that if someone was present who knew the actual details about Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, he or she would probably shake their head thinking, “What poor deluded souls.”

I do not say that to cast doubt on Christ’s resurrection. Rather, it is quite doubtful that the Garden Tomb ever belonged to Joseph of Arimathea or that it ever contained the body of Jesus. That the Garden Tomb is empty is not surprising. That it was bereft of Jesus’ body is also not surprising since His body was probably never there.

The more likely place where our Savior’s body would have been laid is, as much as some hate to admit it, at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. We can tell from pictures that this is where Christ’s body probably lay because it is so ornately decorated. Surely it would honor our Lord to decorate His empty tomb, right? Probably not, since people tend to worship the decorations too. This was probably the location of the Lord’s empty tomb in spite of what the leaders of dead religion have done to it over the years.

And yes, it too is empty! And it’s a good thing because engineers who spearheaded the recent major repair to the church and the site have discovered that the leaders of dead religion built the massive church on a faulty foundation. I like the title of an article Kristin Romey wrote about this discovery that appeared recently in *National Geographic*. She called it, *Tomb of Christ at Risk of ‘Catastrophic’ Collapse*. The problem is that the location of this icon was in Jesus’ day a stone quarry that had been turned into a place where wealthy people purchased tombs and grave sites. I suppose people like Joseph of Arimathea purchased their burial plots there. As a result, the substructure is honeycombed with tunnels and tombs resulting in a very insecure foundation.

So let the site experience a catastrophic collapse! And all the world of organized religion is aghast that I would say something so brash and uncaring. But really, why does it matter if that might possibly have been the resting place for Jesus’ body for a couple of nights? It was a temporary thing. While He was alive on earth doing the work of the Heavenly Father, God the Son rested His body in hundreds of different places. All of them have been forgotten or covered up with the sediment and refuse from two millennia of wars and cultural change. And we don’t care.

All that really matters to us who trust God is that no tomb anywhere in the universe contains the body of our Savior. He who died so that we can have life is alive, interceding for us at the right hand of the Father. His resurrection guarantees that we who have faith in Him will also be raised one day. That takes a lot of faith, doesn’t it? Actually, faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the apex, the pinnacle of all faith in everything God has revealed about Himself in the Bible.

Without faith it is impossible to please God. God said that He created all things including us. Do you believe that? God said that our purpose in life is to honor Him by submitting to Him. Do you believe that? God said that our Savior who bore the penalty for our sins because we can’t submit to Him is risen from the dead. Do you believe that? If you believe these things, you are different from most of the people who have ever lived. Most people have faith in organized religion, or science, or even themselves. We believe God’s

Word. Therefore, we don't need to see an empty tomb to know for certain that Jesus is risen.

Faith is Certain That God Created All Things (Genesis 1:1,26-27).

Faith is assured of the Bible's opening words. The Bible begins, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)*. These words clearly lay the foundation that God actively brought all things into existence. God chose to reveal this truth to His created beings by stating that ***the beginning*** was like this: God decided to create the universe. Why He chose to create it as He did was entirely His choice and understood only by Him. He created all things out of nothing. He created by simply uttering His word. "*God said*" was sufficient to bring all things into existence. And everything that is, from the smallest star in the farthest part of the universe (which we have not discovered yet) to the man named Adam and His wife Eve, came into being because God commanded it.

That is a fantastic proposal in the opinion of most people as well it should be. People like me think it is fantastic because it is unusual, unexpected, great beyond full explanation. The result of God's creative word is astonishing. We should never cease to be amazed at the extent and intricacies of God's work. The complexity of the smallest living organisms defies our imagination. The grand magnitude of the discovered universe, not to mention what we have not discovered, eclipses our ability to comprehend its size and scope. Even our body, from its ability to heal itself to the information written on our DNA, amazes us.

We should be driven to say with David the psalmist, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork (Psalm 19:1)*. *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well (Psalm 139:14)*. Those are the rightful conclusions (as well as many other similar conclusions) of the person who has faith in what God has written in the Bible.

Everyone does not agree with us. Many people conclude that trusting the Bible record about creation requires a lot of blind faith. The sad reality is that most people today prefer to trust the

conclusions of scientists. After all, the scientists draw their conclusions on an abundance of evidence, don't they? Who are we laymen to argue with their conclusions? They have decided that the evidence clearly testifies to the fact that this astonishing universe has evolved from a very small beginning to the mammoth expanse we see today. They try to explain to the citizens of earth that within the evolving universe, in some unexplainable way, circumstances lined up just right so that we humans evolved through a process of a single cell becoming something different, over and over, until voila' here we are.

And somehow in that long, slow process an astonishing amount of genetic information was written on our DNA. Those same scientists tell us that one DNA molecule in our bodies contains the equivalent of over 1,000 volumes of information, each volume consisting of 500-1,000 pages each. That all this information which determines every detail of our intricate, amazing makeup and personality seems to have come by chance is flabbergasting. So unbelievable is that explanation of creation that I conclude that I don't have enough faith. It requires great faith in science to accept these conclusions when they are admittedly fraught with errors, inconsistencies, inexplicable phenomena, and missing links.

In the final analysis, everyone exercises faith in something. Some people have faith in the Word of God. Most people have faith in the words of man. This crucial point of placing faith in the Word of God is attacked for good reason. If there really is a God who created all things, He has the right to rule over us. Ultimately, therefore, the conflict of faith is rooted in the conflict about who is in charge. If I believe God's Word, I must conclude that God is in charge. If I reject God's Word, I conclude that I am in charge. Human nature desires to be God, which is a direct assault against our Creator's intent.

Faith in God's Word is assured that God created all things. But at the same time, faith in God's Word is assured that God created humanity with purposeful intent. The same Bible that tells us that God created all things, also tells us that God created humans to reflect His character. *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (v.26a)*. *So God created man in his own image, in the*

image of God he created him; male and female he created them (v.27).

To conclude that God created us in His image is not to conclude that God made us to look like Him physically. God is a spirit. A spirit does not look like anything. It just is. We are not spirits. We contain spirit but it is within a human body of God's design. Rather, God made humanity in His image in that He created us to manifest His character. He has gifted humanity with traits similar to His own. We have a will, we have emotions, we have ability to create, and we have a sense of eternity in our souls. All of these traits should work to reveal God's person and character. It usually doesn't.

Creating us in His image, God also created humans to have dominion. *And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth (v.26b).* Because God is Creator, He has dominion over His entire creation. But God has delegated authority to His created beings. Angels have certain responsibilities as His messengers, servants, and praise-givers. God has given us a sense of His capacity to rule.

Therefore, people who have faith in God's Word should act according to His design. We have faith that we should take responsibility according to His will. We have faith that in the process of taking responsibility we should manifest, demonstrate God's character. That is what living by faith looks like. People who have faith in God's Word live like they believe that God is our creator. That is a particular way of living.

Faith is Certain That Creation Should Honor the Creator (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

The person who truly believes that God created him or her will of necessity also believe that they should live in a way that honors their Creator. Solomon believed that. Having spent his life plumbing the depths of wisdom, he concluded, *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13).*

According to Solomon's conclusion, God is honored when His created beings keep His commands. Solomon's challenge for us to

fear God is not a negative admonition. To fear God is to highly respect Him. God created us to fear Him. It is a learning process that begins with the created being coming to grips with God's awesome person and power. Learning to fear God concludes that God is able to speak all things out of existence as easily as He spoke them into existence. Therefore, it must also conclude that God is able speak "ME" out of existence. Fear of God concludes that He is powerful enough, just enough, and faithful enough to keep His promise about hell.

Therefore, the maturing process in the fear of God decides that it is safest and wisest to be right with God. Mature fear has decided to walk with God holding His hand rather than trying to dodge the judgment sent from His hand. Therefore, we believe that God created us for the express purpose of showing Him respect. That is what the fear of the Lord looks like.

Accordingly, Solomon taught that when we learn to respect the Lord, we will best demonstrate that respect by submitting to Him. To submit is simply to arrange our affairs, actions, even thoughts and desires under an authority. Faith concludes that God created us to show Him respect in the way we think and act. Therefore, faith in God's Word believes this is not an option but a duty. That is what Solomon meant when he concluded that showing the supreme respect for God is our duty.

God requires us to keep His commands. Again, this is not an option but a duty. It is such a serious requirement that to fail in this requirement results in death. In the beginning God required Adam and Eve to honor Him by keeping the specific command, *"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:17a).* Attached to that clear requirement was the consequence: *"For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17b).* The consequence of not honoring God was physical death. At the moment of disobedience, failure to submit, Adam and Eve began a new process never experienced before – they began to die. Every single person since then experiences the same consequence if we live long enough.

But a second consequence for failure to submit to the Creator was spiritual death. Immediately upon sinning, Adam and Eve were separated from God in their spirits. Suddenly they no longer desired

fellowship with their Creator – something they had always experienced in the days before they disobeyed God. We know what that is like. We each are born in this condition of being spiritually dead, unwilling and unable to fellowship with our Creator.

Therefore, while living in a sinful world in a flesh that seeks its own purposes and pleasure, God's requirement to honor Him by keeping His commands puts a strain on faith. How can we fully trust and depend on our Creator when we cannot even keep the commands, the words, He gives to us? Human nature, being spiritually dead, invents various responses to explain our inability to obey our Creator. People lie about whether they actually keep His commands. Or people reinterpret God's commands to require something He never intended, even while a simple reading of the command makes God's intent clear. Maybe the most common response is for people to simply ignore God's commands. Some people boldly, purposely rebel against God's commands, which is really what all of the above alternatives to obedience are. Some people even attempt to salve their consciences in this matter by creating their own commands as a substitute. We call those manmade religions.

But whatever our response, the fact is that we cannot do what our Creator created us to do. It is a serious matter to fail to do our duty to keep His commands. Failure is not just sin, but a bold and direct assault against Him. Failure to live according to God's righteous character results in unrighteousness. But what can we possibly do to achieve righteousness?

We need a substitute. If we truly believe that God is our Creator, and if we truly believe that obeying His commands is the right thing to do, and if we truly believe that we are not able to do the right thing in keeping His commands, then we must truly believe that we are left in our unrighteousness. Do we believe that God is able, and justified, to eternally punish unrighteousness? Faith believes that! So what can we do? How can we escape God's justified punishment?

We have already concluded that we are unable to do the right things in order to satisfy our Creator. We believe that we will pay for our unrighteousness for eternity. We need someone to step up and help us. We need a Savior from sin. We need someone to take the penalty for our sins upon Himself.

Do we have great faith that our Savior and Substitute is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God? The Bible that reveals God as Creator also reveals that God the Son died on the cross, shed His blood as the payment, the acceptable sacrifice for our sins. But if He is dead, how do we know His sacrifice was accepted by the Creator? If He is alive, He is able to represent us before God the Father, our Creator, pleading the price of His blood to cover our offenses. Therefore, we must fully believe that He is alive. If He is alive, He had to have risen from the dead. Not only does that conclusion require faith, but it is the cornerstone and foundation of our faith. All other faith in God's Word rises and falls on this reality.

Faith is Certain That Christ is Risen (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

There is a resurrection. That simple affirmation sounds like utter foolishness to many thinking and educated people today. Some people, not only in our day, but way back in Paul's day, doubted the idea of resurrection. Therefore, he argued, *Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead (v.12)?*

Human nature has difficulty accepting the idea of resurrection. That is understandable mainly because it is natural for us to put great trust in our experiences. If we have experienced something firsthand, we tend to believe it. Otherwise . . . not so much. We have never experienced resurrection either in ourselves or in others. Some people have told stories about coming back from the dead. We do not know if those stories are true, or if the people involved simply experienced some strange phenomenon. And those who do claim to have returned from the dead were not in a grave for three days.

For the Christian, resurrection from the dead is a future hope based on faith. Do you have hope alone or do you have fully dependant faith? What is the object of your faith in such a critical matter? It almost could go without saying that if people in general doubt the concept of resurrection, they surely doubt Christ's resurrection. That is why Paul stressed the importance of believing in the concept of resurrection. *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised (v.13).*

If resurrection is not possible, then Christ did not rise. The skeptics of the world who rely wholly on human experience to make their conclusion deny that Christ rose from the dead. But the apostles have written the biblical accounts that claim Christ did indeed rise. Do you believe it?

If we trust the statements of the Bible, our faith is validated by Christ's resurrection. If Christ's body is in the tomb, our preaching and faith are pointless. If Christ's tomb is not empty, all works of faith are also empty. Even preaching about Christ the Savior from sin is vain. *And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain (v.14a)*. That kind of preaching is useless, pointless, a waste of time if Christ is not risen. In fact, all Bible preaching is pointless. Simply preaching about heaven is invalid and not edifying if Christ is not risen. Preaching about helping others is also vain if Christ is dead. Preaching about God's goodness and His love for people is not encouraging but is foolish if Christ is still in the grave. All Bible truth rises and falls on the certainty that Christ is risen.

And if Christ is not risen, not only is preaching futile, but even *your faith is in vain (v.14b)*. If Christ did not actually rise, you and I have no basis for our faith. Faith must have an object on which it is fixed and settled. Do you think that Christ rose from the dead simply because you believe it so much? Then your hope alone is the object of your faith. If Christ is not actually risen, our faith has no foundation and you might as well believe that you are superman and will never die.

Worse is the fact that preachers of supposed "truth" are misrepresenting God if Christ is dead. *We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised (v.15)*. If Christ is not actually risen, preachers who claim to preach the Bible are misguided at best, liars at worst. If the concept of resurrection is a myth, Christ is dead, our faith is dead, and our preaching is a lie.

God's promise regarding resurrection rises and falls with Christ's resurrection. *For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised (v.16)*. The reality of Christ's resurrection is the key to all we preach and all we believe. The resurrection is not an optional part of our religion and teaching.

And worst of all, if Christ is not risen, we are still in our sins. *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins (v.17)*.

If Christ's tomb is not empty, people of faith are pitiable. It means that every single person who died having great faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ to atone for their sins has actually perished. *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (v.18)*. We who believe such error and preach such error should be pitied. There is no future if Christ is dead, no matter how much we believe it. *If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied (v.19)*.

But, faith declares that Christ is risen. *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20)*. "But in fact" are some of the greatest words in the Bible, greatest words in human history. In **fact** Christ is risen. I believe that Christ is risen because the Word of God declares that He has. I believe that Christ is risen because I see the evidence of changed lives based on His resurrection. I believe that Christ is risen because He lives in my heart through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of faith. That is what the righteous people must live by faith.

Faith fully trusts that God created all things for His glory. Therefore, faith fully trusts that God created me to reflect His glory. Faith fully trusts that God expects me to honor Him by keeping His commands. Faith admits that I fail to do what God expects me to do. Therefore, faith clings to the reality that Jesus Christ paid the price for the penalty for my offenses against God and that God, therefore, put Christ's righteousness on my account. Faith firmly grasps the certainty that Christ rose from the dead to validate His saving work. Because Christ rose from the dead, my faith is firm, validated, certain and verified. I will live forever in the presence of my Savior because He rose from the grave and lives forever.