



Speaker:
Paul Forrest

Christ's March out of Hades

4/17/2022 (SUN) | Bible: **Matthew 28**

Two days ago, we congregated together around the word of God to consider the great day of the atonement. It was the day when the incarnate son of God was hanged on a tree as a common criminal.

We marvelled that His Most High Majesty, the Lord Jesus Christ, was tortured and killed by mere creatures he had himself created. To make it worse, the Prince of Life was murdered by the very people God had first chosen to reveal himself to. The Jewish people had been blessed in their history by great miracles, prophets of God, and now even the coming of their Messiah.

We noted the taunts of the bystanders too. *He could not save himself*, they said. Their mistake was thinking Jesus didn't have the *power* to save himself. The truth was far more shocking: he was, instead, **fully committed to staying on the cross until the entire penalty for our sins had been paid.**

And finally, we observed his anguish of soul while he suffered. On the one hand, we understood it was necessary for Jesus to do this alone. There was no heavenly Father to receive his prayers; no Holy Spirit to console him; no angels to minister to him in his long three hours of agony.

But on the other hand, it was with gladness of heart we saw him see it through. Had he succumbed to temptation and given up his mission on the cross, all of God's people—including all of us—would face the same fate as the rest of the world: a lost eternity in a place of outer darkness. But no; he chose to stay put and have placed on him the iniquity of us all.

The Bible puts a huge emphasis on Calvary. It's one of the most pivotal moments in the history of man—perhaps even *the* most important. But let's remember this is just one stage in God's process of securing salvation for his chosen people.

Let's be clear on this: **the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ would be useless had he remained in the grave.** It was necessary for our salvation that Jesus be raised from the dead. And this he did! HE IS ALIVE! And his rising from the dead is central to the Christian faith.

On this Easter Sunday, I'd like us to look at the predictions that Jesus would rise again; we'll then consider the event of the resurrection itself; and finally, we'll think about the glorious results of this miracle of miracles.

The prophecies

Psalm 16:9-10—Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. **For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your holy one see corruption.**

Whoever this is talking about, they're praying to God that when they die, they won't be left to rot in the grave. (Sheol is just an ancient name for the grave.) It's a special request, seeing as decomposition after death is the normal way of things. This person is certain that because he is the "holy one", God will make an exception.

We're not left to debate who this refers to. In the book of Acts, the apostle Paul states clearly the one praying in this Psalm was none other than the son of God. Jesus confesses to his father his great confidence that he will be raised from the dead very soon after his death.

Jesus Christ did die. He did go into the grave, which was called by the Greeks "Hades". But his confidence was well grounded; he wasn't abandoned but was resurrected after just a few days.

Matthew's gospel records Jesus himself referring to his own exit from the grave:

Matthew 20:17–19—And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, "See, we're going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they'll condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, **and he will be raised on the third day.**"

He told them not only would he *be* raised but *when* it'd happen. He knew the exact day. A few chapters earlier in Matthew's gospel, Jesus compares his time in the grave to Jonah's short spell in the belly of the great fish. And he uses that to show he too would come back on the third day.

As an aside, I'd like to add this. The Bible speaks of Jesus *being* raised from the dead, and it also talks about Jesus *raising himself* from the dead. The raising of Jesus was an act carried out by Father, Son and Holy Spirit—a Trinitarian act.

We'll have a look at just one more reference. This is in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 15:3–4—For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that **he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...**

Paul and the rest of the church were aware that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were in agreement with the descriptions of Messiah in the Old Testament. He was the fulfilment.

The resurrection of Jesus was an incredible event. And it was all part of the grand purpose of God to have as his own the people who he would save.

The event

We need to establish first why the resurrection of Jesus was so special. After all, we can all recall miracles throughout the history of the Scriptures where people were brought back from the dead. For example, Elijah raised the son of the widow at Zarephath, and Jesus himself of course raised Lazarus.

But the raising of Jesus from the dead was unique. You see, all the people in the Bible who were raised from the dead were given a bit of extra time on this earth, *but they all eventually died again.*

But Jesus was raised in a **spiritual** body. It was neither a body like ours nor a mere spirit. It was a real body but one which would never die.

It's interesting that Jesus raised Lazarus after **four** days. That ancient society regarded the fourth day as the beginning of proper decomposition. (Yuk!) So leaving the raising of Lazarus until the fourth day made the miracle all the more impressive.

So you see how, symbolically, the resurrection of Jesus on the **third** day avoided the beginnings of decomposition. Truly, he was not left in the grave long enough to experience corruption of the flesh.

And so it was Jesus marched right out of Hades in victory!

- The church rejoiced, their testimony now being vindicated by this great wonder.
- The Jews were gutted and tried to cover it up with lies and bribes.
- The holy angels, who'd held their breath for three days, celebrated as they received their Lord back from the dead.
- And the devils looked on in horror, seeing their victory in having Jesus killed was nothing of the sort. Without doubt, they'd have liked nothing better than to put Jesus back in the grave and cover him up as much as possible to try and prevent him leaving. But it was too late. They knew then they'd lost.

The grave, you know, is sometimes likened in Scripture to a giant creature which opens its mouth to swallow men up. We might say that, as Jonah was a foreign body in the big fish and was necessarily spewed out, **so the son of God did not belong in the grave, and it ejected him.** The grave simply couldn't hold onto him! One of the hymn writers wrote:

*One day **the grave could conceal Him no longer,**
One day the stone rolled away from the door;
Then He arose, over death He had conquered;
Now is ascended, my Lord evermore!*

He is risen!

The consequences

1 Corinthians 15:20-24—But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

Paul here outlines a couple of the consequences of Jesus rising from the dead. So I'd like to now quickly go through some of the reasons the Bible gives for the resurrection of Jesus:

1. **The resurrection of Jesus showed he was God**, and this left us with this wonderful doctrine that Jesus was not just a man like us but was also God.
2. **The resurrection fulfilled numerous Bible prophecies**, giving us greater confidence in the authority of the holy Scriptures.
3. **The resurrection blessed Christ himself**, and our hearts are made glad when we hear of our saviour being happy.
4. **The resurrection showed the sacrifice of himself was acceptable to God**, and we understand it's through this great work we are accepted.
5. **The resurrection allowed Christ to reclaim his throne**, and the Scriptures tell us that we reign alongside him—even now.
6. **The resurrection, we're told, declares to the world judgement to come**, yet we who belong to Jesus will come through it as fully innocent.
7. **The resurrection enabled Christ to take up his place as our advocate**, interceding for us at the throne of God.
8. **And the resurrection was a great victory over death itself**. This is how we can have spiritual life now AND be given immortality in the future. The first chapter of Revelation says John fell at the feet of the saviour, but Jesus laid his hand on him and said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last...I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, AND I HAVE THE KEYS OF DEATH AND HADES."

This present world might last another ten, hundred or thousand years for all we know. The fact is when Jesus returns, we'll most likely all be in the grave. And in this present image, the grave is portrayed as a great prison.

BUT JESUS HAS THE KEYS TO THE GREAT IRON GATES. HE'LL UNLOCK THE GATES AND SWING THEM WIDE OPEN, FREEING ALL OF US AND GIVING US IMMORTALITY LIKE HIS OWN. AND ALL THAT FACES US IS AN ONGOING STATE OF UNINTERRUPTED HAPPINESS WITH JESUS AND EACH OTHER.

Conclusion

Because Jesus is risen, we too will be brought out of our graves and made alive for evermore. All opposition to God and his church will have been wiped out. Left standing will be the bride of Christ in all its splendour, standing “amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene”.

This is where the story was always heading. In this paradise of God promised to us, we’ll experience the perfected form of what we have now:

- We experience true joy now, but THEN it will be heightened and endless.
- We’re able to express love and receive love now, but THEN our love for God and each other will be untainted by sin in ourselves and others.
- And although we have real communion with Jesus now, THEN it will be truly face-to-face.

Oh, I can only imagine the conversations and the praise that will take place in the world to come!

The archaeologists could dig up the whole of Jerusalem and everywhere around it in the hope of finding the remains of this man Jesus. But they won’t see him. He was there...but not any more. HE HAS RISEN! HALLELUJAH!

Amen.