

2011 Resurrection Sunday

The Best News Ever Heard

Selected Texts

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The Best News Ever Heard¹

Introduction

What is the best news you have ever heard?

If you are a young child, the best news you have ever heard may be that your family is going on a vacation to Disney World.

If you are a high school senior, the best news you have ever heard may be that you got accepted to the college of your choice.

If you are a college senior, the best news you have ever heard may be that you just landed your dream job after graduation.

If you are a young couple, the best news you have ever heard may be that you are going to have a baby.

If you are an older person, the best news you have ever heard may be that your test results came back showing that you don't have cancer.

All of us can think of a time when we heard what we believed to be the best news we ever heard.

Yet, no news compares with the incredible news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That *is* the best news ever heard.

Why? Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ the best news ever heard?

Lesson

Today, I want you to give you three reasons why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best news ever heard.

I. It Is True

First, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best news ever heard because it is true.

¹ The material for this sermon is from James Montgomery Boice, *The Christ of the Empty Tomb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 125-135.

It often happens that some events that sound like great news at the time turn out to be superseded by other greater events. Or sometimes the news about the event turns out to be wrong. The week your family wants to visit Disney World is the week that a category 5 hurricane shuts down the place. The college you want to attend is unaffordable and you don't qualify for scholarships. You end up having a miscarriage. And so on.

But the news about the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not like that. The news about the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best news ever because it is true. And there is evidence to support the claim that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true.

A. *The Evidence of the Historical Narratives Themselves*

The first evidence to support the claim that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true is the evidence of the historical narratives themselves.

The historical narratives stand up to the most rigorous scholarly scrutiny. To begin with, there are four independent accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Some people allege that the four accounts were made up by authors who collaborated together and came up with similar accounts. However, had they done so, then one would not have the apparent discrepancies in the various accounts. For example, the four accounts differ on the number of angels at the tomb of Jesus, the number of women who went to the garden, the time of their arrival, and so on. These differences can be harmonized, but the point is that these apparent discrepancies would have been eliminated had the authors collaborated together to concoct a story.

On the other hand, it is also clear that the authors did not make up their accounts separately either. If you are familiar with the accounts of Jesus' resurrection, you know that they are largely in agreement with each other. For example, the setting is the same, the characters are the same, the sequence of events is similar, and so on.

So, if the accounts were not made up by collaboration and if they were not made up separately, the only remaining possibility is that they were not made up at all. That is, they are simply four true and independent accounts by those who were presenting historical facts in their writing.

B. The Evidence of the Nearly Empty Tomb

The second evidence to support the claim that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true is the evidence of the nearly empty tomb.

We often talk about “the empty tomb” of Jesus. The fact is that when the disciples went to the tomb on that first Sunday morning the tomb was *not* empty. Oh, to be sure, the body of Jesus was gone. But his grave clothes were still there. The Bible is clear that they were undisturbed, as if the body of Jesus passed through them (John 20:6-8). So, what happened to the body of Jesus?

Some say that Joseph of Arimathea or the Roman or Jewish authorities moved the body of Jesus. But there was no reason for them to do so. Furthermore, once the disciples started preaching that Jesus was alive, they could simply have produced the body to demonstrate that he was in fact still dead.

Others say that the disciples moved the body of Jesus. It would have been extremely difficult for a band of fishermen, tax collectors, and civilians to get past the Roman soldiers posted to guard the tomb of Jesus. Furthermore, the disciples would hardly have been willing to die (as most of them did) for believing a lie.

C. The Evidence of the Changed Character of the Disciples

The third evidence to support the claim that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true is the evidence of the changed character of the disciples.

After the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples were heartbroken, disillusioned, and fearful. But once they saw that Jesus was alive

they started proclaiming with astonishing boldness to all people that Jesus was in fact alive. They were changed from being cowardly to being incredibly bold. And, as I mentioned a moment ago, most of them died for believing that Jesus was alive.

D. The Evidence of the Appearances of Jesus Christ

The fourth evidence to support the claim that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true is the evidence of the appearances of Jesus Christ.

Over a period of forty days Jesus appeared on many different occasions to the women in the garden at the tomb, the eleven disciples, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and more than five hundred at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). In fact, when Paul wrote that Jesus had appeared to more than five hundred people at one time, he also noted that most of them were still alive, so that skeptics could go and verify the resurrection of Jesus for themselves.

E. The Evidence of the Change of the Day of Worship

And the fifth evidence to support the claim that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true is the evidence of the change of the day of worship.

Up until Jesus' resurrection, God's people worshiped him on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. However, after the resurrection of Jesus, Christians gradually switched to worshiping God on Sunday, the Christian Sabbath. Nothing but the resurrection of Jesus explains the switch from worshiping God on Saturday to Sunday.

Each strand of evidence is enough to prove that Jesus Christ really is resurrected from the dead. However, throughout history people have tried to prove that Jesus did not rise from the dead. Some of the best books on the resurrection of Jesus have actually been written by lawyers, some of whom started off trying to disprove the resurrection. Sir Edward Clark, the famous English lawyer, once wrote:

As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. As a lawyer I accept the gospel evidence unreservedly as the testimony of men to facts that were able to substantiate it.²

That is why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best news ever heard. It is the best news ever heard, not because it is a nice story which gives us an opportunity for a holiday once a year, but because it is true.

II. It Came After an Apparent Defeat

Second, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best news ever heard because it came after an apparent defeat.

A victory is always good news. Sometimes I go to bed and the Rays baseball team is losing by couple of runs heading into the ninth inning. It is always great to wake up in the morning and learn that the Rays in fact won the game.

James Montgomery Boice illustrates a victory after an apparent defeat in his wonderful book called *The Christ of the Empty Tomb*. He tells the story of how the news of the Battle of Waterloo first came to England in June 1815.

There was no fast electronic communication in those days, but everyone knew that a great battle was pending. They were anxious to hear what would happen when Wellington, the British general, faced the Frenchman Napoleon. A signalman was placed on the top of Winchester Cathedral with instructions to keep his eye on the sea. When he received a message, he was to pass the message on to another man on a hill. That man was to pass it on to another. So it was to go until the news of the battle was finally relayed to London and then across England.

² Quoted by Michael Green, *The Day Death Died* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 45-46.

At length a ship was sighted through the fog which on that day lay thick on the channel. The signalman on board sent the first word—*Wellington*. The next word was *defeated*. Then the fog closed in and the ship could no longer be seen.

“Wellington defeated!” The message was sent across England, and great gloom descended over the countryside. After a few hours the fog lifted, and the signal came again—“*Wellington defeated the enemy!*” Now England rejoiced!³

When Jesus died, his disciples were crushed. They were discouraged, disappointed, disheartened, and defeated.

But, then, on the third day Jesus rose again!

When Jesus died the world could have shouted, “Christ defeated!”

But after three days the fog lifted, and the message came through to the world: “Christ defeated the enemy!”

So, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best news ever heard because it came after an apparent defeat.

III. It Proves Many Important Truths

And third, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best news ever heard because it proves many important truths.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves the essential doctrines of Christianity.

A. There Is a God and the God of the Bible is the True God

First, the resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that there is a God and the God of the Bible is the true God.

Pastor and teacher Reuben A. Torrey put it this way:

Every effect must have an adequate cause, . . . and the only cause adequate to account for the resurrection of Christ is God, the

³ James Montgomery Boice, *The Christ of the Empty Tomb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 129-130.

God of the Bible. While here on this earth, as everyone who has carefully read the story of his life knows, our Lord Jesus went up and down the land proclaiming God, the true God of the Bible, “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” as he loved to call him, the God of the Old Testament as well as the New. He said that men would put him to death, that they would put him to death by crucifixion, and he gave many details as to what the manner of his death would be. He further said that after his body had been in the grave three days and three nights, God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the God of the Bible, the God of the Old Testament as well as the God of the New Testament, would raise him from the dead. This was a great claim to make. It was an apparently impossible claim. For centuries men had come and men had gone, men had lived and men had died, and as far as human knowledge founded upon definite observation and experience was concerned, that was the end of them. But this man Jesus does not hesitate to claim that his experience will be directly contrary to the uniform experience of long, long centuries. . . .

That was certainly an acid test of the existence of the God he preached, and his God stood the test. He did exactly the apparently impossible thing that our Lord Jesus said he would do. . . . The fact that Jesus was thus miraculously raised makes it certain that the God who did it really exists and that the God he preached is the true God.⁴

B. The Deity of Jesus

Second, the resurrection of Jesus Christ proves the deity of Jesus.

When Jesus lived upon this earth he claimed to be equal to God and that God, that same God, would raise him from the dead three days after his execution by the Roman authorities. If he was wrong in that, he was either a lunatic or a liar. But, if he was right, the resurrection would be God’s way of validating his claim, and Jesus would indeed be the Lord he claimed to be. So, did God validate it? Did Jesus rise from the dead? Yes, he did! The resurrection is God’s seal of approval on Jesus’ claim to be divine.

⁴ R. A. Torrey, *The Uplifted Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1965), 70-71.

That is why the apostle Paul, who was transformed from one who vehemently opposed the resurrection of Jesus to one who unwaveringly supported the resurrection of Jesus, wrote that Jesus was “declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4, *NIV*).

C. All Who Believe in Jesus Are Justified Before God

Third, the resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that all who believe in Jesus are justified before God.

Paul said in Romans 4:25 that Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

How does that happen? Jesus claimed that his death would pay for the sin of his people. He said that he had come “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

Well, he died as he said. But how would we know that his death would be accepted by God to pay the penalty for the sin of his people? We can be sure that God accepted Jesus’ death to pay the penalty for sin because he raised him back to life on the third day. Therefore, God accepted Jesus’ sacrifice as a sufficient payment for sin so that we might be justified before God.

Listen again to what Reuben A. Torrey wrote on this subject:

When Jesus died, he died as my representative, and I died in him; when he arose, he arose as my representative, and I arose in him; when he ascended up on high and took his place at the right hand of the Father in glory, he ascended as my representative, and I ascended in him; and today I am seated in Christ with God in the heavenlies. I look at the cross of Christ, and I know that atonement has been made for my sins; I look at the open sepulcher and the risen and ascended Lord, and I know the atonement has been accepted. There no longer remains a single sin on me, no matter how many or how great my sins may have been.⁵

⁵ R. A. Torrey, *The Bible and Its Christ: Being Noonday Talks with Business Men on Faith and Unbelief* (New York, NY: Revell, 1904-1906), 107-108.

D. Believers Can Have Victory over Sin in this Life

Fourth, the resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that believers can have victory over sin in this life.

This is the argument of the apostle Paul in Romans 6. He said in verse 4, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” This means that all who believe in Jesus Christ are united to him so that his power becomes available to them. We may be weak and utterly helpless, unable to resist temptation for a single minute. But he is strong, and he lives to give help and deliverance every moment. So, victory over sin is not a matter of my strength, but of his power. His power is what I need.

E. Believers Have Evidence for Their Own Resurrection

And fifth, the resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that believers have evidence for their own resurrection.

On the night before Jesus died he comforted his disciples with these words, found in John 14:2–3, “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

Jesus said that he would go and prepare a place in heaven for those who believe in him. But how can we be sure that he will do that? Well, if the resurrection validated his other statements, then it validates this one as well. So, that if you are a Christian today, you can have every confidence that Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for you. The moment you die, you will be with Jesus for all eternity.

So, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best news ever heard because it is true, it came after an apparent defeat, and it proves many important truths.

Conclusion

But the resurrection of Jesus Christ is only the best news ever heard for those who believe that news.

Some people hear about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and dismiss it as a wonderful piece of fiction.

Others hear about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and they are skeptical about it. After all, who has ever heard (or even known) of anyone who has come back to life after having died. I am not talking about people who have had near-death experiences. I am talking about someone who has come back to life and is still alive after hundreds of years! Many people find the concept of resurrection simply too hard to accept.

In fact, that was the case of one of Jesus' own disciples. Thomas was not with the rest of the disciples on that first Sunday evening when Jesus appeared to them. Later that evening when Thomas joined the group they told him that they had seen Jesus. But Thomas doubted, even though he could not explain the clearly evident change in their demeanor from fear to joy. And so 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."

Eight days later, Jesus' disciples were inside the house again, and this time 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!" (John 20:24-28).

That is the proper response to the news of Jesus' resurrection. Believe that Jesus really is alive, and he will save you from your sins, and your life will be changed too. 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

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
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PRAAYER:

Our Father in heaven, thank you for raising Jesus Christ from the dead on that first Easter Sunday morning. And thank you that this is the best news ever heard.

I pray that everyone who is here today will experience the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

If you are not yet a Christian here today, you can be transformed by Jesus. Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who has paid the penalty for all your sin. Express your belief in a prayer like this:

Heavenly Father, I have rebelled against you. I have sinned in my thoughts, my words and my actions—sometimes unconsciously, sometimes deliberately. I am sorry for the way I have lived and ask you to forgive me. Thank you that Jesus died on the cross so that I could be forgiven. Thank you that I can now see clearly who Jesus is and why he came. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me follow him whatever the cost. Amen.

If you would like to talk about what it means to be a Christian today, please speak to me following the service. I have a little booklet that I would like to give you. It is called *Do You Know?* And it describes how you can be sure that you are a Christian.

CHARGE:

If you would like to talk about what it means to be a Christian today, please speak to me following the service. I have a little booklet that I would like to give you. It is called *Do You Know?* And it describes how you can be sure that you are a Christian.

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