

Keys to Death and Hell
What Happened When Jesus Arose?
(1 Thess 4:13-18)

Many pastors and churches today have been led to believe that a successful ministry is primarily evaluated by the number of people attending on a given Sunday. This may seem to be a crass observation, but unfortunately, an accurate one. If you have ever been a part of these churches, the driving force behind everything action taken is connected to the goal of growing to the next new high number. Bigger is always better. These goals are easily justified. Why wouldn't we be more excited about people coming to know Jesus? But that is when we must ask, are they truly learning about Jesus?

Last Sunday, we celebrated Easter. It's the biggest holiday for our religion all year. For those willing to just be honest with themselves for a moment, where does the excitement for Easter come from? The truth of what Christ is for us, or a special day for family photos and fun dinners? We all know that the resurrection of Jesus is important. I don't think anyone here would disagree with that statement. Something so huge in the Christian faith seems to have little impact on our daily lives.

QUESTION: Why do you think most Christians have little knowledge or excitement about the resurrection?

Church growth at any cost has hurt many of you sitting here today. You have felt the machine run over you week after week only to feel guilty for thinking that something might be wrong with you. You know you should be excited and uplifted by the music and sermon, but you simply feel dry and distant from God and other Christians. One of the reasons this happens is that the eyes of the church have been misdirected to focus on the achievements of humans (how many people attended last week) instead of what our Messiah attained for our eternity.

There are endless implications when looking at how and why Christ rose from the grave, but we are going to only look at three in our lesson. Within these three implications, we will find reasons to have hope, be renewed in our love for Christ, and, more importantly, have our faith renewed in the gospel. When the people of God gather to hear and be renewed in the power of Christ's resurrection, the focus becomes on what Christ has done for us, not what we have done for him.

1) The Vindication of Christ

“the action of clearing someone of blame or suspicion.”

“proof that someone or something is right, reasonable, or justified.”

1Pet. 2:22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

1Pet. 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

The death of Christ would have been meaningless and without power if Jesus remained dead; here is why: If Jesus never rose from the grave, it meant he too deserved the punishment of death because he was a sinner. That would mean all of his claims, promises, and power would have been one big lie leading millions to believe he was a false Messiah. Christ proved to the world he is the way, the truth, and the life. He can forgive our sins. He can heal our bodies. He has the power to take us home to be with the Father. Every promise Jesus made while on this earth will come true because he rose from the grave. A dead savior means a dead salvation. But a living savior means we will live forever.

QUESTION: When the world mocks our faith in Jesus, we know that he proved he wasn't a liar but truly God. How does that encourage you when the world mocks our faith?

2) Our Justification from death

To be justified means to be declared right. God looks upon us, seeing no need for payment or righteousness. When Christ arose from the grave, he justified us. He placed us back in a perfect relationship with the Father needing nothing.

To justify us, Jesus had to defeat what was keeping us from the Father: sin, and death. Paul wrote in 1Cor. 15:26, *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."* An enemy is one who is in opposition to you, who technically wants to destroy you, kill you. Paul wrote in 2Timothy 1:10 that Jesus *"abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."*

The last enemy, that which could destroy us, has been abolished.

Paul quoting the prophecy in Psalms 110:1

1Cor. 15:54...

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

1Cor. 15:55 *"O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?"*

Heb. 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

Heb. 2:15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Jesus has freed us from the fear of death. We have nothing left to fear. Nothing can ever happen to us because Christ has already won the battle over our last enemy, our final enemy. This is why death is now described as sleeping because we are simply waiting for our new bodies in our new home. When that stone was rolled back, Jesus walked out holding the keys to hell and death. They now have a new master.

Rev. 1:17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last,

Rev. 1:18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

We have nothing to fear. Our Messiah walked out of the tomb holding the keys. Our greatest enemy is forever defeated.

QUESTION: How can these verses above encourage us when we are struggling or help others when they are struggling?

1) Jesus has all Authority

Once someone makes you a promise, what is the security of that promise? The capacity of the one promising. When we tell a child, “I promise I will not let anything bad happen to you.” It is a nice gesture, but we really don’t have control over what happens to them, not in an absolute sense.

After Jesus rose from the grave, listen to what he told his disciples, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*” (Matt. 28:18).

Paul described Jesus’ power to be “*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church*” (Eph 1:21-22).

There is no greater authority or power than Christ. Nothing is outside of his rule and control. When we face the persecution of this world, we can look past the person claiming Authority over us and know who truly is the one in charge, our loving Savior.

*Rom. 8:38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,
Rom. 8:39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

QUESTION: Part of the hope of the resurrection is the power Christ holds over us. Nothing can separate us from him. What are areas we struggle with to believe this at times? What causes us to doubt this promise?

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PRAISE, PRAYER, AND CONFESSION:

- What can you offer to the Father in praise?
- What is a sin you need to confess?
- What is a burden we can carry?

- What can we take to our Father in prayer?