

Well, today the worldwide church celebrates the keystone holy day of the Christian calendar. Easter is the center of the Christian faith because resurrection is the center of the Christian faith. Its sort of the main thing. In America, we make a bigger deal out of Christmas – and I’m all for that - but God becoming man doesn’t mean much by itself. No, we must keep going through Lent – commemorating the temptation of Jesus. He had to be faithful. But not just his life – we have to continue on to Good Friday. But a crucified King helps no one. But Sunday’s coming.

I want us to spend some time in John 11 [843] / **1-4** In the gospel according to John, we learn very few names. When Jesus turns water to wine at a wedding in chapter 2. No names. The true miracle there is how he turned water into wine then to Welch’s grape juice. Then there is ch. 4 and the Samaritan woman. We never learn her name. Nor of the “blind man” healed in chapter 9. But here, we learn the names of Jesus’ friends: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And the brother is sick. “He whom you love is ill.” “Jesus, your dear friend Lazarus is sick.”

But Jesus says this won’t lead to death. We know it may pass through death but it will not terminate there. It is for the glory of God, so the Son of Man may be glorified through it. “Son of Man” was Jesus favorite way of referring to himself. It comes from Daniel 7, but we don’t have time for that this morning. Jesus is going to get glory through this trial.

**5-6** Say what? Come again? Run that back, please sir. Old NIV. Jesus loved these friends. So he delayed. We would expect the opposite. But the Son of Man has plans that man does not understand. / He may not come when you call but he’s always on time. This delay is going to hurt though. This passage is real. Sometimes it hurts bad and we know not why. But, as the old hymn goes, we can trust that behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face. God's purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flower.” Hold on, saint. Weeping may endure for the night but joy comes in the morning.

**7-16** Jesus tells his disciples to head down to Judea, but they know it might not go well there. Jesus isn’t worried. He says Lazarus has fallen asleep. You see, for believers in Jesus, you don’t really die. You take a nap. You sleep. 1 Thess 4:13: “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” On the other side of a nap is an awakening. But I am getting ahead of myself.

His disciples think he is actually just sleeping so Jesus has to shoot them straight. Lazarus has died. No one has told Jesus that Lazarus has died, but he’s the God-man. He knows. No one has to tell him. He is the God-man. He’s more than just a good human teacher. If he were not God in the flesh, he would actually not be a good human teacher. He said things that would be crazy if he were not God. London pastor John Stott said, “The most striking feature of the teaching of Jesus is that he was constantly talking about himself. It is true that he spoke much about the fatherhood of God and the kingdom of God. But then he added that he was the Father’s ‘Son,’ and that he had come to inaugurate the kingdom. Entry into the kingdom depended on men’s response to him. He even did not hesitate to call the kingdom of God ‘my kingdom.’ This self-centeredness of the teaching of Jesus immediately sets him apart from the other great religious teachers of the world. They were self-effacing. He was self-advancing. They pointed men away from themselves, saying, “This is the truth, so far as I perceive it; follow that.” Jesus said, “I am the truth; follow me.” The founder of none of the ethnic religions ever dared to say such a

thing” . . . . The great question to which . . . [Jesus’] teaching led was, ‘Who do you say that I am?’<sup>1</sup>

CSL Trilemma. Back in 1871, John Duncan said, "Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or he was himself deluded and self-deceived, or he was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable." Friend, if you are here, who do you say that he is? You must reckon. So glad you are here. 3 weeks.

Jesus says he is glad so that his disciples would have their faith strengthened. Poor Thomas has the nickname the doubter, but he aint doubting here. He says, let’s go. If he dies we die, let’s ride. That’s what it means to follow Jesus. Death to self. His invitation is take up your cross and follow me. What did the baptizer say?: we must decrease; Christ must increase.

**17-22** Jesus strolls in, on his own time. It was a common Jewish belief that the soul of a dead person remained in the vicinity of the body, in hopes of re-entry for three days, but once decomposition set in, the soul departed. John likely includes this detail because wants his readers to know that this is not a mere resuscitation. Lazarus is truly dead.<sup>2</sup>

Martha hears of Jesus coming so she goes to him. Mary doesn’t even get up. Staying seated had gone well for her in a previous encounter with Jesus. Martha got up and was busy with many things but Mary just sat at the Lord’s feet. Jesus had said, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion (Luke 10:42). Now she remains seated, not to be in the presence of her Lord but likely despondent due to his absence. Martha goes to Jesus and is understandably upset. Jesus could have prevented this. But even now, the Father will hear the Son.

**23-24** Mary holds to standard Jewish eschatology. When Jesus says he will rise again, she thinks Jesus means he will rise again on the last day when all God’s people are raised from the dead – the general resurrection. Jesus means something else.

**25-27** Jesus is the resurrection and the life. If you follow Jesus, though you die, yet shall you live. And you will die. Because of our sin. Sin and death were not part of God’s original design and they will not be part of the new world when Jesus returns. But – Rom 6:23 – the wages of sin is death.

Death is the most fearful enemy we face. All people are deathly afraid of death. Atticus said, "It kills me that death is the only thing we can be sure of, yet we live as though it were a rumor." But it aint no rumor. Grim reaps. The odds are incredible. Ten out of ten die. Death is the greatest leveler, the ultimate equalizer. As one puritan put it, "Against this arrest there is no bail" (Swinnock). London pastor Charles Spurgeon said every person is walking around with grave dust in his mouth and a coffin on his back.

There are truly no survival stories – only delay stories. Spurgeon: "Here is the history of the grass – sown, grown, blown, mown, gone; and the history of man is not much more." Every

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Sott, *Basic Christianity* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), 23; 31 new one.

<sup>2</sup> FDB, 668.

birthday is one less year, every beating pulse decreases the total number we are given. 2 Cor 4 says we are outwardly we are wasting away. Life is a savings account in reverse. Daily depletion. Everything we have here will one day be lost. Happy Easter.

And that day will be here much sooner than we care to think about. And you'll quickly be forgotten. Ecc 1.11 "There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them." We don't even know the names of our great great grandparents. Forgotten in just a few generations. As we continue to age, we lose more and more. To age is to lose. In his novel *Everyman*, Philip Roth says old age is not a battle, but a massacre. Death is not so much a one-time event as a lifelong process. A siphoning process. Job 14 says man is few of days and full of trouble. Job 18 calls death the "king of terrors."

Doesn't matter how healthy you are. Consumers of cabbage and kale meet the same fate as consumers of red meat and ice cream. You have all probably heard of the Atkins diet, after the cardiologist and nutritionist Robert Atkins. Named by Time as one of the ten most influential people in 2002. That very year, he had a heart attack and died the next year.

Though you die, yet if you are in Christ – you will live. For those who trust in Jesus, ultimately, we live. "Tho he die, yet shall he live." One novelist says for the Christian, death is "an end with a future"<sup>3</sup> Not a period but a comma. As George Herbert said, "Death used to be an executioner. The resurrection means he's now just a gardener."

How? Well, this story Luke is telling will continue and Jesus will be crucified on a Roman cross, then rise from the dead three days later. He is the resurrection! And he is the King, the Messiah and what is true of him is true of those in Him and we can become in him through faith and repentance. When we trust in Christ, what is true of him becomes true of you.

The NT calls Jesus firstfruits. 1 Cor 15:20-26:

Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. There will be a secondborn, thirdborn, fourthborn, 3millionborn. / Because death had no claim on him, death will have no claim on his children. Friends, resurrection is coming. We are waiting for new creation. Embodied life. Not clouds and harps and chubby babies. I like chubby babies. They're the best. Y'all met Nora Kate Smith yet. What a doll. But eternity will be more than that! Resurrected physical bodies on a resurrected physical world. Jesus conquers both spiritual and physical death. Easter is about new creation.

When we die, our body and soul is torn asunder like it was never meant to be, but when the Lord returns, our body and soul will be reunited. This is why the Bible refers to death as sleep. On the other side of the nap is an awakening. Resurrected physical bodies living on a physical new heaven and new earth for all eternity. New bodies on a new world. True Easter attire.

**28-37** Mary goes to her Lord. When Jesus sees her and her friends weeping, Jesus was "deeply moved" in his spirit. Even though Jesus could have prevented it and will resolve it, he is terribly

saddened by the death of his friend. Jesus wept. Shortest verse in the Bible – 3<sup>rd</sup> shortest in Greek. Jesus grieves at the fallenness of the world. The Son of God grieves with humanity’s grieving.

He knows we are east of Eden. Exiled from home. This life is full of grief and sadness. Grief is great. But Jesus knows. He entered in. In C.S. Lewis’ book, *The Magician’s Nephew*, a boy named Digory has a dying Mom: “But please, please – won’t you – can’t you give me something that will cure Mother?” Up till then he had been looking at the Lion’s great feet and the huge claws on them; now, in his despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own and (wonder of wonders) great shining tears stood in the Lion’s eyes. They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory’s own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself. / “My son, my son,” said Aslan. “I know. Grief is great. Only you and I in this land know that yet. Let us be good to one another. But I have to think of hundreds of years in the life of Narnia.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus wept. He knows grief is great. We are an Easter people, but still living in a Good Friday world. Always winter, never Christmas. I recently finished a novel that will almost certainly be my most favorite read of the year, called *Theo of Golden*. I commend it to you. I want to read a lengthy excerpt: Theo, an old man is talking to a young artist named Asher, who draws portraits of people: “‘Asher, in every face I detect sadness.’ A crease of curiosity formed between Asher’s eyes. ‘Why do you say that?’ ‘Well, it is subtle, and maybe it takes an old man – an expert in sadness – to see it, but it is there in every portrait, in some more than others. It is not gloomy or angry or even terribly obvious. It is like a weariness or an unmet longing or a disappointment; something we inherit from those who lived before us.

But to these old eyes, it is in every face, *the* universal affliction. It is what gives such gravitas to your portraits and makes them so believable. Even when your subjects are smiling, the shadow of sadness is there. And so far, my meetings at the Fedder only confirm my suspicion.’ Asher mulled over Theo’s remarks. ‘I never really thought of it that way. I certainly don’t do ‘sadness’ intentionally.’

‘Ah,’ Theo nodded his affirmation, ‘the mystery of art.’ Asher leaned in and spoke softly. ‘So, you’re an expert in sadness?’ Theo shrugged. ‘I suppose anyone as old as me could say the same. When we’re young, we’re usually too busy or too self-absorbed to see it, but by the time one is almost ninety, this world has beat the sadness into him quite deeply. Every week there is some tragedy or reminder to keep it alive and well.’

It was an unusual subject to discuss while standing in line for coffee. They placed their orders, stepped away from the counter, and continued talking. ‘Theo, I appreciate that you’re such a sensitive man. You have a tender heart.’ ‘Not tender, Asher. Broken. My expertise in sadness is hard-earned. But I realize more and more that it is a gift. Living with sadness, accepting it, is easier than trying to pretend it isn’t there.

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<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: HarperTrophy, 1955), 154.

It is another of life's great mysteries that sadness and joy can coexist so compatibly with one another. In fact, I wonder if, on this side of heaven, either one can be complete without the other.' . . . 'Asher, we are masters at masking our sadness, but deep down inside, if we are honest, we know that there is an unsatisfied longing deep inside all of us. Your portraits invite people to be alone and quiet and truthful with themselves; to admit the longing and to discover the goodness in their sadness. Maybe?' . . . [Asher has to leave for an appointment] 'But here's a question before I go. What about the child? That one there?' Asher pointed to the beaming face of a young boy. Theo looked. 'OK. That one: no sadness. But draw him again in thirty years'.<sup>5</sup> The universal affliction. Jesus knows. But, for the believer 2 Cor 6:10 uniquely makes sense: sorrowful yet always rejoicing. Luke 6:21: "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh."

Jesus wept. We love the old hymn, "And can it be." Charles Wesley, 1738. "And can it be that thou my God, wouldst die for me." Could just as easily be "And can it be, that Thou, my God, wouldst cry with me? Amazing love, how can it be?"<sup>6</sup>

**38-39** Martha warns Jesus. So cute. KJV: by now he stinketh. **40-44**. Two words: come out. The old pastor said that if he had not said the name Lazarus before the call, all the graves of Jerusalem would have been spit out their corpses. An immovable object is met by an irresistible force. Death meets Jesus.<sup>7</sup> / Jesus overcomes the death of Lazarus and he will one day do the same for us. **5:21, 25-29**.

Friend, I wonder if you ever zoom out and ask, "What's the point of Christianity?" It's a good question to ask of anything, really. But especially of religions. What's the end goal? The purpose of Islam is so that those who are good enough can obtain paradise where they will be met by 72 black-eyed virgins. The goal of Mormonism is that the really good people can have their own planet one day, they'll become gods. The goal of Buddhists is reincarnation. Hindus believe you need to collect enough good karma to have a suitable reincarnation. The goal of JW is to be holy enough to be one of the 144K and make it to heaven. Some false teachers that claim to be Christians say the goal is health, wealth, and happiness. But what of biblical Christianity? John 3:16 is not popular for no reason! The end goal of Christianity is that we will not perish. Easter is not about chocolate, bunnies, or pastels. No, Easter is about resurrection: the overcoming of death, our greatest problem.

Sociologist Peter Berger says this about the purpose of religion: "The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of men as they stand before death, or more accurately, as they walk, inevitably, toward it."<sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ offers banners that are as credible as the tomb is empty. That empty tomb launched a worldwide movement.

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<sup>5</sup> Allen Levy, *Theo of Golden* (New York: Atria, 2023), 213-215.

<sup>6</sup> FDB, 677.

<sup>7</sup> FDB, 681.

<sup>8</sup> *The Secret Canopy*, 51.

Friend, if you are here and you haven't been to church in a while. Thank you for coming. We are honored you'd come. And I would just ask you the same thing Jesus asked Martha: **25-26**; Be like Martha and Mary.**27-29**. Mary "rose" quickly. Rose is the same verb used of the resurrection of Jesus in the Gospels (*egerthē*). Go to him. Because he rose, we will rise.

Saint John Chrysostom, pastor in Constantinople (d 407). Listen to this excerpt from his Easter sermon: "Let no one grieve at his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again; for forgiveness has risen from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it. He destroyed Hades when He descended into it. He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh. Isaiah foretold this when he said, "You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below. Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with. It was in an uproar because it is mocked. It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed. It was in an uproar, for it is annihilated. It was in an uproar, for it is now made captive. Hell took a body, and discovered God. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see. O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory? Christ is Risen, and you, O death, are annihilated! Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down! Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice! Christ is Risen, and life is liberated! Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead; For Christ having risen from the dead, has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!"<sup>9</sup>

**Benediction:** May the loving power of God, which raised Jesus to new life, strengthen you in hope, enrich you with his love, and fill you with joy in the faith.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.saintjamesmodesto.org/PDF/pascha\\_homily.pdf](https://www.saintjamesmodesto.org/PDF/pascha_homily.pdf)