

Mission Completed: An Easter Sermon

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

April 9, 2023

HDBC

From 1969-1974, nobody had more Top 10 hits, sold more records, or concert tickets than this group. They had 21 consecutive Top 40 hits and 12 straight gold albums. By late 1975, they had sold nearly 50 million records. And it all started with their hit single, “One.”

One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do. Two can be as bad as one. It's the loneliest number since the number one. **Who can name the group?**
Three Dog Night

According to Three Dog Night “one” is not such a good number. And in some cases, two can just as bad as one. But what about three. Well, they did not get to three. **This morning I want us to think about the number “3”.**

Parents often tell their child *I'm going to count to three.*

When there is a short countdown, it is often **3 – 2 – 1.**

We often say ***on the count of three.***

Three is an important number to God.

God is a triune God:	Father,	Son,	Holy Spirit
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Three dimensions of time:	Past,	present,	future.
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Three parts of a person:	Body,	soul,	spirit
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Jesus had three key disciples	Peter,	James,	John
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Three people crucified together

Peter denied Christ three times

Three events complete the mission of Christ

Three events define the Gospel

To understand Easter you have to see the resurrection as the final event in a three-part mission. They are interconnected and interdependent. Neither one has the power to forgive sins or to offer salvation on its own. They all work together. Look at Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 15:1-4.**

Three actions that make up the Gospel. Death, Burial, Resurrection. The first and third are the keys to our salvation, the death and the resurrection. But Paul includes the burial in this statement of what the Gospel is, so it is important. Let's consider these three events in light of the three days.

1. Friday: Day of Death

There are some things that even skeptics admit about Jesus. He was **a real person who died by crucifixion** outside the walls of Jerusalem in the first century. The Bible declares that he was more than just a man and that his death was more than a routine execution. He died not because of his own crimes, but for the sins of others. There is a deep, profound meaning to His death. We know that because we see the **mission completed**.

But think for a moment about what his death meant to those first century followers who were seeing only part of the **mission completed**. They believed his words, trusted his promises, and were committed to him as savior. They were devastated. This becomes clear when you read what they did. They had no sense that His death was a **good thing** at the time.

Most of the apostles scattered when he was arrested.
One (Peter) verbally denied that he even knew Jesus.
The women planned for a permanent burial for Jesus.

A dream had been born in the hearts of these fishermen, tax-collectors, political radicals and demon-possessed. For their entire lives they had known the poverty and frustration of living under Roman rule. Grown tired **of the stale and lifeless religion** of their day. Lives revolved around the struggle of providing enough food for each day and the struggle to be right with a God who seemed impersonal and distant.

Then He came along. Spoke of the kingdom of God. Claimed to be the long-prophesied Messiah. The one who would lead his people, a deliverer, king, priest. And His actions verified His words.

For three years they enjoyed His company. For the first time life had meaning. The emptiness within was now gone. A dream had been ignited in their hearts. There was a future to anticipate and a reason for hope.

They had risked it all for him, given up professions, family, and friends, in some cases wealth and power. They were **all-in**. But then, He died, and with his death went their hopes, dreams and purpose. *Death tends to do that.* It brings the greatest pain, the greatest sense of hopelessness and the greatest despair. It can steal joy, destroy plans & paralyze emotions. What he had tried to help them understand was that *death was an essential part of the mission, but it was not the entire mission. There was more to come!*

2. **Saturday: Day of Burial**

On Friday Jesus died. On Sunday he was resurrected. But what are we to make of Saturday? The focus of Saturday has to be the burial of Jesus. Nothing else is revealed in Scripture about this day. The only significant thing about Saturday is that he **remained in the grave**. Keep in mind that Paul said the Gospel is the death, **burial**, and resurrection of Jesus. In the gospel the burial was also important. **Why?** I'll suggest three reasons.

1) **It verified the death of Jesus**

An immediate resurrection would have certainly opened the door for speculation that Jesus was not really dead. The extended time in the grave would have minimized that speculation. In reality, the evidences that Jesus **was dead** were clear. He been scourged, beaten, crucified, speared in the side by a Roman soldier who was tasked with making sure he was dead. He had been legally declared dead by Pilate. It was clear to the ones who laid him in the grave that he was dead. Saturday was a clear confirmation of this important fact.

2) **It confirmed the hopelessness of the situation**

In a word, it gave the followers of Jesus time to think and process about what had happened. It was time to grieve and to realize the hopelessness of their situation. *Sure, he had raised others from the dead, but he was alive to do it. Now that he is dead, it's over.*

3) **It provided an opportunity for their faith to grow.**

Adversity is the most important ingredient needed for faith to grow. Faith only grows stronger when it is used. And it is only used when it is challenged. As the disciples realized Jesus was dead and that their spiritual situation was hopeless, that led to a **crisis of faith**. Would they

continue to believe the words of Jesus even when they could not see the fruit of those words. While his body remained in the tomb, would they believe, would they trust? Would their faith sustain them through the dark, silent time of inaction?

They did not have the history of the resurrection like we do. It would be understandable if their faith faltered. We do have the history of the resurrection. We know the mission is completed. Therefore, we have a foundation for faith even when we go through a **Saturday**, even when we can see the hand of God, we trust and wait for He will deliver.

3. **Sunday: Day of Resurrection**

Without this day the other two would have been routine and meaningless. The resurrection gives power to the death and burial. It confirms that those events were not simply natural, normal, or routine. They were planned, prophesied, orchestrated, and completed exactly as God determined.

Think about what the resurrection meant in that day.

The resurrection broke the permanence of death and replaced it with life.

The resurrection turned mourning into singing.

The resurrection replaced deep despair into uncontrollable joy.

The resurrection verified the truthfulness of Jesus' claim to be God.

The resurrection reversed the curse on the creation.

The resurrection disarmed death. It is no longer to be feared.

The resurrection confounded the demons. They did not win!

The resurrection frustrated the religious leaders. It renders religion useless.

The resurrection proved that the penalty for our sins had been paid in full.

The resurrection demonstrated the love of the father for his son.

The resurrection **completed the mission**, securing our salvation.

Think about what the resurrection means in our day.

The resurrection validates our faith.

The resurrection secures our future.

The resurrection enables us to persevere.

The resurrection energizes our hope.

It empowers us to live. We can live with purpose and joy.

I've told you the story of Chippie the parakeet. But I think his story is worth

hearing again on this Easter Sunday.

Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One minute he was peacefully perched inside his birdcage, and the next he was sucked in, washed up and blown over.

His problems began when Chippie's owner decided to vacuum out his bird cage. She stuck the attachment inside the cage, and about that time the telephone rang and distracted her attention. When she turned, Chippie was gone. She immediately hung up the telephone and looked inside the vacuum cleaner bag – sure enough, Chippie was there – alive, but stunned.

Since he was covered with dirt and debris, she grabbed him and raced down the hallway to the bathroom **where she stuck him under the faucet and ran cold water over him for two minutes.** She realized that the bird was soaked and shivering, so she did what any compassionate bird-owner would do – she reached for her hair dryer and blasted the bird with hot air. Chippie never knew what hit him.

Several days later, the reporter who covered the story called to see how Chippie's recovery was coming along. The owner said, ***“Well, Chippie doesn't sing much anymore. He just sits and stares.”***

Without the resurrection we would all be a lot like Chippie. Drawn into our shell and hunkered down. Life would be uncertain and scary. Faith in a dead man is worthless faith. But faith in a resurrected man . . . well that is different. **The resurrection prepares us to live!**

It prepares us to die.

Yesterday I listened again to part of a message by Allister Begg from 2019. He was reminding us that we are saved by grace alone in Christ alone. He pointed back to the Evangelism Explosion question *If you were to die tonight and God asked you, why should I let you into Heaven?* If your answer is in the first person, you have missed it. It must be in the third person. What he (Jesus) did for me.

He then referenced the thief on the cross. He had never been to church,

never been to Sunday School, never read the Bible. had not been baptized, could not articulate one doctrinal truth, yet he made it. He was in Heaven. Aliister Begg imagined the conversations in Heaven. Angel must have said, how did you get here? I don't know. Well, why are you here? I don't know. All I know is ***the man on the middle cross said I could come.***

Because of the resurrection, the man on the middle cross says we can come. The resurrection **prepares us to die.**

The resurrection means the **mission is complete.**

This is the Gospel. The **death, burial and resurrection** of Jesus. Do you believe it? Are you willing to yield to the risen Christ as Lord of your life and to receive His forgiveness of your sins?