



**Resurrection Sunday 2024**  
**Matthew 28:1-9**  
**Realities of the Resurrection**

**Summary:** Jesus gives new life to us that begins now, is for all of life, and keeps growing.

We gather this morning to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its life transforming power. Read the account with me in Scripture and then I want to point out four things for us to consider today.

**Matt 28:1** Now after the Sabbath, as the first *day* of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead *men*.

5 But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you."

8 So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go *and* tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

**1. Jesus gives us new life.**

Jesus rose from the grave in order to give new life to us. Christians often speak of being saved. At some point Jesus showed up in their life and made a difference – they have a before and an after. Personally, I can tell you, it's true. Jesus saved me. He renewed me. He reset my life.

In my mom's house there's a picture of me and my younger brother Jake holding our two youngest brothers in front of the Christmas tree. I was 21, he was 15, and we were both stupid. We were wasting our lives and headed nowhere, I won't describe all our sins for you, but it involved most of the usual suspects.



The picture was taken in California, but we grew up in a singlewide mobile home down a dusty red dirt road in rural Texas. Our nearest neighbor was a mile away. We burned our

trash in a fifty-five-gallon drum instead of dragging it to the curb and used to fish out the soda and beer cans to shoot at for target practice. We had a duck for a pet; he spent most of his time on the front porch but occasionally wandered into the house.

Jake's dad, who was my stepdad, was alcoholic and abusive at times. I've seen a wrought iron coffee table go flying across the living room. I've seen blood come from my mother's nose. I've seen a lot of things I wish I had never seen. I've heard a lot things I wish I never heard. I still remember dirty jokes I was told and dirty movies I was allowed to watch.

Dirty. It's not a fancy word. It's not a big word. But it's a fitting word, and true. There are things in this world that make you dirty. And then Jesus comes along and offers to save you – to make you clean inside and out.

Living here in Northern Virginia I've learned there's a difference – a difference between being clean on the inside and the outside, and how both are necessary.

You probably know a lot of people that are clean on the outside – Jesus called them “whitewashed tombs.” They've kept their nose clean and their record clean, even their cars and their shoes are clean. But that's all on the outside. On the inside they're still dirty from all the things they've seen, and done, and thought, and tried.

Yes, if there's something you need to know about living here in the suburbs of D.C., it's that you can be clean on the outside, but dirty on the inside. And if you can keep your dirt hidden, 'dirty little secrets' we call them, and managed, you call still achieve what people call 'success.'

Personally though, going back to the path I was on, I was dirty through and through. The dirt on the inside and the dirt on the outside were coming together to make a muddy mess of my life that gave me little hope for the future. I didn't know anything about college, or resumes, or internships. I didn't have a plan for my life. But I knew a little bit about Jesus. I had heard about Him when the neighbors took me to church a few times growing up and then again when I went to youth group in high school because I was invited by friends.

I knew enough to know that what I was doing with my life was wrong. Nobody told me. I just knew it. I felt it. Remorse, conviction, guilt, call it whatever you will, but something was gnawing at me. And so, about a year after that picture in my mom's house was taken, I found myself in church. I hadn't been in one in years. And the way I got there that morning was kind of messed up – I was trying to impress a Christian girl.

Well, as the people around me began to sing songs like the ones we sang this morning – God crushed me. He confronted me. It was time to change, and I knew it. I knew there was no putting it off, no more making excuses, there was no going on any further. Everything had to change and it had to change now.

I can't tell you what the pastor said that morning. I don't remember the songs we sang. If I did, I'd make sure we played them here every Sunday in the hope they would have the same effect on someone else. But there was no magic in those songs. There was no magic in what the pastor said. It wasn't some self-help strategy or life-coaching, there were no tips or hacks I needed to remember.

It was God doing something radical in my life. It was the beginning of something new. Something made possible by what He had already done through His Son in a tomb in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. He was giving me a new life, bringing me back from the dead, saving me from my own destruction.

The Bible says the blood of Jesus washes me, cleanses me, and makes me new.

**Isaiah 1:18** "Come now, and let us reason together,"  
Says the LORD,  
"Though your sins are like scarlet,  
They shall be as white as snow;  
Though they are red like crimson,  
They shall be as wool.

Because of the resurrection I am forgiven of my past. I'm not enslaved to it – it's who I once was, but it's not who I am anymore, and it's not who I ever want to be again. I had a reset. I might feel a pull back toward old habits or memories sometimes, but there's a clear line of separation between who I was and who I am.

And with this new life comes new direction – I *know* who I am. I understand my place in the world – I know why I am here and what life is about. I belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ and this gives shape and direction to everything I do. Who I am as a Christian affects the way I work, who I married, how I treat her, the kids we've had, how I love and parent them; it seeps into everything.

And when I received this new life, I also received the power to live it. God gave me His Holy Spirit to live inside of me. He gave me a godly wife to love and encourage me, to do life with me, to be my best friend, someone I can help and be helped by. And then, He put me into the family we call the Church that spans the globe – and so I've got people in this church and all over the world that love me, care about me, pray for me, and help me make it through life because we each love Jesus.

Which connects to the second point I want to make.

## **2. The new life begins in this life.**

Some people think all this stuff about Jesus and the cross and the resurrection is great on the spiritual level – but they don't see how it applies to their daily lives on Tuesday morning at 10:30.

So, they look to other things and people to change their lives believing when that thing or that person comes along he, she, it, or they will bring a new start. Instead of looking to Jesus, you look forward to:

- When you graduate
- When you move or when you move out
- When you finally lose that last ten pounds
- When you finally find the right guy or girl, or right group of friends
- When you get the right job
- When the kids leave the house, or when you get that promotion, or when you retire

But those things don't bring new life. They bring changes to be sure, but they don't bring a new birth. Only Christ can do that – and He can do it because the resurrection was a physical event and not just a spiritual concept. Look with me at

**Matthew 28:9** And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came **and held Him by the feet** and worshiped Him.

A real body rose from a real grave and was really alive – He could be touched and seen. Later in the Upper Room Jesus told Thomas to put his hand in the wounds, and Jesus ate real food.

I love the way it's put in this poem I found once: Seven Stanzas at Easter by John Updike

Make no mistake: if He rose at all  
it was as His body;  
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse,  
the molecules reknit,  
the amino acids rekindle,  
the Church will fall.

It was not as the flowers,  
each soft Spring recurrent;  
it was not as His Spirit  
in the mouths and fuddled eyes  
of the eleven apostles;  
it was as His Flesh: ours.

The same hinged thumbs and toes,  
the same valved heart  
that — pierced — died,  
withered, paused, and then  
regathered out of enduring Might

*Copyright The City Gates Church, 2024. Authorized for personal use only.*

new strength to enclose.

Let us not mock God with metaphor,  
analogy, sidestepping transcendence;  
making of the event a parable,  
a sign painted  
in the faded credulity of earlier ages:  
let us walk through the door.

The stone is rolled back,  
not papier-mache, not a stone in a story,  
but the vast rock of materiality  
that in the slow grinding of time  
will eclipse for each of us  
the wide light of day.

And if we will have an angel at the tomb,  
make it a real angel,  
weighty with Max Planck's quanta,  
vivid with hair,  
opaque in the dawn light, robed in real linen  
spun on a definite loom.

Let us not seek to make it less monstrous,  
for our own convenience,  
our own sense of beauty,  
lest, awakened in one unthinkable hour,  
we are embarrassed by the miracle,  
and crushed by remonstrance.

Updike's poetic point is that the resurrection was a real event that occurred within space and time – if you had been there, you could have touched Jesus.

The apostle Paul wrote something very similar to the church in Corinth where some people were saying there wasn't a real resurrection, because, after all, that's impossible, right? But, as Paul points out, if there is no resurrection, everything else falls apart.

**1 Corinthians 15:17**... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.<sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.<sup>19</sup>If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Think about this – Jesus did not come to earth just to teach the Sermon on the Mount. He didn't come just to multiply loaves and fishes or walk on water. He didn't come just to cast out demons and heal people. If that was all He needed to do – just pass us some

information, or get our attention with some miracles, He could have just come for a short visit – He could have wowed us with His words and wonderful miracles and we could just reflect on the things He had said and done. There would be no need for a death or a resurrection.

But we aren't just missing some data, or wonder, we need a physical, bodily, resurrection because we need a reset in this real life. And that brings us to point number three.

### **3. The new life is a whole life**

Here's something that I hope is shockingly obvious and yet incredibly significant – when Jesus rose from the grave, He wasn't missing an arm or any toes – no parts of His body were left in the tomb. His whole body was raised to new life. That means that this new life He offers us extends to every part of our lives as well. Nothing is exempt.

Jesus wants to bring new life to the parts of your life that are filled with suffering, hurt, and addiction. But He also wants to bring new life to parts of your life that are thriving, successful, and prospering. The goal is to be fully formed in the image of our God – to have His fingerprints on every part of our lives, inside and out. And, as a result, to live a fulfilling, fruitful life because I am what I was made to be. For you to say, "I am flourishing. I am thriving. Every part of my life is being revitalized by this new life. I'm both experiencing and expressing heaven in every part of my life."

If you're a Christian this morning, if all of this is a familiar story to you, I want to ask – is it *comprehensive* for you? Does Jesus really have all of you? Are you *fully* formed? Or is there some part that you've been holding back? If you could see yourself in a mirror spiritually – would you be all there? Or is there an arm missing?

I did this baptism once for a lady who had cut herself badly with a knife – she was a waitress in a restaurant – anyway, the whole thing was bandaged up pretty good and it was fresh – so she wrapped it up in a plastic bag to protect it from the water and when she went under, the arm stayed up. So, if you see her in Heaven and she's only got a stump on one arm, you'll know why – the part that didn't go under didn't count.

I'm kidding of course. It had to be that way for her, but it shouldn't be that way for us – Jesus wants us entirely. He's not satisfied with 50% or even a majority share in your life. So, I'm encouraging you – now is the time to give Him the rest – whatever you've been holding back, or whatever you've been trying to take care of on your own, whatever areas of life still hurt – let Him in there too. Don't leave any biohazardous waste in the tomb – let the power of the resurrection and new life rush into every part of your life.

Which brings me to my last point:

### **4. The new life keeps growing**

Jesus cried out on the cross “*Tetelestai*,” it is finished – the moment you place your faith in Christ, the new life begins and it continues through eternity – we still face difficulties here on earth, and our spirits cry out for Jesus to return and set up His kingdom, but until that day, we seek to do all that we can to honor Him by living in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It’s THIS life He has redeemed, and it is THIS life that we must live for Him.

It’s this life that He redeemed for me – as I said earlier, Jesus rushed into my life and hit the reset button. He saved me from what I would have made myself and transformed me into something I could have never imagined. And He grabbed my little brother too. What God has done in him has been equally amazing. Now he has more hair in his beard than he used to have on his head.

He’s married to a wonderful, godly woman, they have two beautiful little girls. And, ten years ago, he beat me. No one on either side of our families had ever graduated from college, but he earned his PhD in environmental engineering six months before I earned my doctorate in ministry and now I pastor a church and he’s a professor of biology at California Baptist University in Southern California.



We look back and marvel at how our lives have turned out, what they have become, *and it’s all because of Jesus.*

That is why the resurrection is so important and why it matters today. Friends,

1. **Jesus gives us new life.** So, have you received it? If you need a reset from God, you can have one this morning. All you need to do is tell Him you’re a dirty sinner and ask Him to make you clean. There are no magic words, just a sincere heart – ask God for whatever help you need.
2. **The new life begins in this life.** So, are you living it now or waiting for later? It’s not a Christmas present, you can open it early, and you should.
3. **The new life is a whole life.** So, is it comprehensive for you? Does the gospel affect everything? Even your dating life? Even when your work life? Even your finances? Are you fully formed, or missing pieces? What other parts of your life do you need to invite God into? And how might you begin to thrive if you did?
4. **The new life keeps growing.** Can you look back and see the change? Can you see who you might have become without Jesus? Can you see where you might have gone without Him? And, can you look ahead with joyful expectation for where He is taking you and what He is making you?

If you have questions about any of this, or if you want to receive this new life, or you want to pray about anything at all and you want someone to pray with you or for you – there are

people available by the doors on your way out. Just tell them you have some questions or tell them you want prayer. They will be happy to answer any questions you have, or pray with you, and if you want to learn more, or think more about these things, they have some books you can take home too as our gift to you.

But first, let me pray and then we'll praise God with one final song.

Let's Pray.

Two things you might want to do this morning:

**First Steps:** We have a luncheon coming up next week after second service – a chance new people to discover what this church is all about, connect with ministry leaders, and learn how to grow in faith, fellowship, and service at City Gates. You can sign up for that in the church's app or by filling out a connection card at the welcome Table.

Sign up for that upcoming class on doctrines of the faith that starts next Sunday, also available through the app or Welcome Table and you can learn more about the Resurrection and other essential beliefs of the Christian faith.





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### Resurrection Sunday 2024 Realities of the Resurrection

**Summary:** Jesus gives new life to us that begins now, is for all of life, and keeps growing.

- Did you/do you have any Easter traditions growing up? At home? At church? Which are important to you to pass on?
- What is your salvation story? How has the resurrection of Jesus made a difference in your life?
  - o If you have known Jesus since your youth, can you see where you might have gone astray if Jesus had not made an impact in your life? Can you see what path you might have gone down if left to your own devices?
  - o Who else's life have you seen change through the power of the gospel?
- God promises to wipe away all our sins and stains, to make us white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). What do you do when you remember your past and the things that God has forgiven? How do you anchor yourself in who/what you are now vs who/what you were then?
- The new life applies to all of life. What parts of the new resurrection life are easy to experience today? What parts of life are hard to hand over or trust God with?
- Why is it important that Jesus had a real, physical, bodily, resurrection and not simply a 'spiritual' resurrection? Why is it important that the resurrection is history and not myth or story?
- Where do you see God leading you? What direction is He taking your life? What is He working on right now and what's next?