



## Resurrection Sunday 2023 Death AND Resurrection

**Summary:** Christianity is built on the amazing death AND the resurrection of Jesus.

Each of the gospels give a summary of the death and burial of Jesus. Each also gives an account of His resurrection, the empty tomb, and the reaction of those who discovered it. I'm reading from Luke's version of the events:

**Luke 24:1** Now on the first *day* of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain *other women* with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. 2 But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. 3 Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. 5 Then, as they were afraid and bowed *their* faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, 7 saying, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'"  
8 And they remembered His words. 9 Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary *the mother* of James, and the other *women* with them, who told these things to the apostles. 11 And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.

This is my hope for us this morning – that we too would depart marveling at the power and significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There are two major Christian holidays – Christmas and Easter. Both are significant celebrations of hope, joy, and peace. But throughout history the church has determined – Easter is best.

Perhaps you have noticed: the symbol of our faith is a cross, not a manger.

Have you ever wondered why? Why don't stores sell little golden mangers on necklaces or earrings? Why are there no headstones engraved with mangers in the cemetery? Why don't churches, including this one, have a large manger on display?

Because: the main purpose of Christmas, was to make Easter possible. Christmas was the opening; Easter is the climax. Christmas tells us "Jesus has come!" Easter tells us why.

Easter is both **brutally honest** and **full of wild hope**, ministering to our souls with a message of death **and** resurrection, allowing us to say there are bad things in this world, but God has overcome them all.

That's helpful, because we know there's a lot of darkness in the world. Teens see it in different places than those who are 25 and they see it in different places than those who are 45 or 55. Progressives see it in certain places and conservatives see elsewhere, but everyone sees it. In fact, it may be the only thing that all people, everywhere, regardless of demographic can agree on – bad things happen in the world.

And the resurrection is **brutally honest** – it says yes. Yes, bad things do happen. Even to Jesus.

Even though He was kind. Even though He helped people and healed people. Even though He spoke up and spoke out for people. He never used His power or position for His own gain. Never behaved unethically or compromised. And yet, Jesus was envied, betrayed, and ultimately put to death by people protecting their personal power.

That's important to know, because the story ends one way if there's an accidental death. We've all heard of or known a terrible tragedy that cuts life short. The star of the high school volleyball team who dies in a horrible accident. The father of three who goes in for routine surgery and never wakes up. No one saw it coming and they didn't deserve it. We hear these stories and we rightfully lament and grieve over what could have been.

But that's not what happened to Jesus. Jesus was actively hunted down, schemed and maneuvered against. His death was no accident. People, real people, wished to do Him harm.

I can't tell you how much I hate to admit that. I can't tell you how much I hate to think about the fact that Jesus lived at a time and in a place where taking someone's life was actually seen as an option for convenience's sake. That people sat down to think about their problems and considered the option – well, we could just kill Jesus.

And yet, in parts of the world today, that's still very much the way it is. People will harm you if you get in their way. Human life does not have the same value to all people in all places.

Here locally it may not often take the form of physical violence, but there is no doubt, because we've all experienced it, people are willing to hurt you if you get in their way. Haven't we all watched a child hit another child to get what they want? Haven't most of us been that child – either the one hitting or the one being hit?

Haven't we had mean things said about us? Haven't we been laughed at or mocked? Haven't we laughed at and mocked others? Haven't we been mean or felt the desire?

But let me ask a question: where does that impulse come from? How do you categorize it? *Is it evolution or evil?* It has to be one or the other – so which do you think it is?

When people are the source of darkness in other people's lives – is that just evolution? Is that just the survival of the fittest? Is that just the strong imposing their way?

Or is there a moral aspect to it? Is it wrong? Is it *evil*? And if so, according to what standard?

One of the great problems of our day is that we don't want to have this category. We resist it in the name of pluralism, in the name of diversity, in the name of unity. It's very, very, hard to say that someone or something was wrong, much less that they or their actions were *evil*.

And so, we see a rise in anxiety, depression, dysphoria, and anger, we hear of a staggering increase in mental health crises and people advocating mindfulness and meditation as coping and anchoring mechanisms because we feel something is wrong in the world, we feel it viscerally in our bodies, and yet we don't have a name for it because we're told to be loving, accepting, and affirming of everything and everyone.

Meanwhile the resurrection is **brutally honest**. It says *there is evil* in the world, and it can be found inside real human beings, people just like you and me. The resurrection says:

- Evil can be found in religious people like the Sadducees and Pharisees who conspired to frame Jesus.
- Evil can be found in the disciple who betrayed Him.
- Evil can be found in those close to Him who abandoned Him when He was arrested and later denied ever knowing Him.
- Evil can be found in the politicians who didn't want to put Him to death, but felt pressured to do so in order to keep the peace and stay in office.
- Evil can be found in the crowds caught up in the buzz and energy of the moment, going along with what was popular, and chanting "crucify Him, crucify Him!"
- Evil can be found in the ones who beat Him mercilessly, inflicting pain for their own amusement, mocking Him all the while.

My friends, Jesus wasn't hit by a car. Jesus didn't come down with some exotic disease. Evil tore through God's Holy Son at the hands of human beings. Like the pinata at a child's birthday party, people struck Him with enthusiasm until He ruptured and burst, then laughed and fought as they snatched up the goodies that came from His harm.

Yes, the resurrection is **brutally honest**. There is evil in the world. And there is evil in us. People like you and me. We experience it from others and we dish it out too. The fact that human beings woke up, ate some breakfast, tied on their sandals and went out later that day to put Jesus to death on the cross, is proof that we needed Jesus on the cross.

Because there Jesus became a sacrifice for us. His perfection and innocence were received by God in exchange for us – He took the suffering we deserved and offered us His innocence.

On the cross Jesus cried out **It is finished**. The work was done. He had faced, endured and absorbed the evil of this world, suffering from us and for us as He laid down His mortal life.

But, God wasn't done yet – remember the resurrection is not only **brutally honest**, it's is also filled with **wild hope** because while Jesus experienced evil, He was not overcome by it. It was strong, it was powerful, it had a shattering impact on His life, but He was not overcome.

Jesus was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb, but He rose again. And now, the **wild hope** of the resurrection is that people like us, who have done evil and experienced evil can receive forgiveness, a future, and a family in Christ.

Jesus offers the promise of spiritual resurrection to anyone who will come to Him, confess the evil they have done, and ask for comfort and healing from the evil they've experienced. He promises that we can, and insists that we must, be born again which is the source of our **wild hope** – that Jesus is willing to endure evil with us, experience evil from us and for us, and then invite us to experience resurrection and transformation with Him.

So, what do you need to be forgiven of today? What wrongs have you done? What keeps coming back to your mind and won't give you rest? Jesus is willing to forgive you of that. The Bible says **if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (1 John 1:9).

- Was it lying? Were you deceptive? Trying to hide something? Being a little shady and devious?

If you are ready and willing to confess, He is ready and willing to forgive.

- Did you do something you shouldn't have? Something you were told not to do? Maybe your conscious even yelled at you and you pressed on anyway?

If you are ready and willing to confess, He is ready and willing to forgive.

- Did you say something to someone, and you know you shouldn't have done it? Whether it was the words you used or the tone you took.

If you are ready and willing to confess, He is ready and willing to forgive.

According to Scripture Jesus is ready and willing to take people who are filthy dirty, soiled and stained by sin and make them white as snow. He is willing to forgive you, forget what you've done and never bring it up again.

He says through the prophet Isaiah:

[Is 43:25](#) I ... [blot] out your transgressions for My own sake;  
[And I will not remember your sins.](#)

He says through the prophet Jeremiah

[Jer 31:34](#) I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin [I will remember no more.](#)

According to the Psalms (103:12) He removes our sins [as far as the east is from the west.](#)

Friends do not miss what is on offer to you from God - If you are ready and willing to confess, He is ready and willing to forgive – it's all part of **the wild hope** of the resurrection.

The message of Easter is: Jesus offers fresh starts and new beginnings. He rose from the grave and calls you to be born again, promising that you can be forgiven fully, freely, and forever – setting you up with hope for the future as God gives you identity and purpose.

How many people do you know who are trying to figure out who they are, or why they're here, or what they should be doing? To all those who receive **the wild hope** of the resurrection, God says you're my child, I'm your Father. Jesus says, You're my brother, my sister, and I call you My friend. You have a heritage, a spiritual family tree. You have a lineage – you matter.

The world, the universe, can feel enormous and overwhelming, especially if you think there's no one and nothing else out there. But God says *I'm here! I'm watching over you. I see you. I know the number of hairs on your head. I know what happened to you yesterday and I see you right now and I've got a future planned for you.*

Again, the testimony of Scripture is clear.

David marvels in the Psalms

[Ps 139:16](#) ...all the days ordained for me were written in your book [before one of them came to be.](#)

And God says through:

**Jer 29:11** I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

And again in

**Eph 2:10** we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Can you hear God saying over and over again, I have plans for you, there is a purpose, there is a future. You don't have to discover it on your own or make it up yourself, it's not found by getting in touch with something inside of you – it's discovered as you spend time with Me. It's all part of the **wild hope** of the resurrection: that you can have a new life through Christ – a life filled with meaning and purpose, destined for a glorious future.

And you'll work it all out in community, connected as part of God's family because Jesus brings us together with God and together with each other.

Unfortunately, the **brutal truth** is still here with us even after we discover Jesus – we continue to experience evil and darkness, depression and anxiety, anger and envy and desire. Evil still pops up occasionally in us and we see it thriving all around us. But, the **wild hope** of the resurrection tells us we're not alone.

Think for just a moment about the marvelous truth of the famous 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm – even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Here is a recognition of the brutality of the world – *there is a valley of the shadow of death* – and sometimes we have to walk through it. God doesn't always lead us around it or magically transport us over it, sometimes we must actually walk through it. But when we do, He says, I'm with you. And I'll never leave you or forsake you. You are not alone.

Jesus said He is the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. This is exactly what happened at the cross. But then He took it up again and calls us to His side.

There we discover yet another benefit – this Shepherd has many sheep. We're not the only ones. The call to Jesus is the call not only to receive the Shepherd, but also to join a flock. Look at the people around you. They're here listening to the same message as you. It's as true for them as it is for you.

We're all in this together. When God is our Father that makes us family. When church is done right, and it's not always done right – that's the brutal truth – but when it's done right, you find yourself surrounded by people who will be used by God to show you love, offer you wisdom, encouragement and correction, and help you carry heavy burdens and He'll use you to do the same for them.

My friends, these are just some of the many, many reasons we celebrate the resurrection. The reasons why we put up a manger once a year but look to the cross every day.

The **brutal truth** of Easter is that you can't have a resurrection without death, but there's **wild hope** of new life because of an empty tomb. Today we celebrate that Jesus Christ has confronted the full force of evil and emerged victorious to offer us forgiveness of all the wrong we have ever done, a future filled with purpose and identity, and family to surround us. May you grasp this truth today, and may you marvel like Peter at the power of the empty tomb.

He is risen. He is Risen indeed!

Let's pray.