

The Reality of the Resurrection – Rev. 1:10-13; 18-20

Introduction: In the War of 1812 between America and Great Britain, Andrew Jackson was given the command at New Orleans. With his riflemen poised behind cotton-bale barricades, they cut down the British troops as they tried to swarm Jackson's position. Jackson's victory at New Orleans made him a national hero and led to his appointment as the first governor of the Florida territory and later, it led to his election to the Senate and even later, the Presidency of the United States.

But history records the fact that his victory was more spectacular than it was effective. You see, the battle of New Orleans was fought several days after the peace treaty had already been signed in Europe. Neither the American nor British troops were aware that the war was over.

After the crucifixion of Jesus, Satan thought he'd won the battle. But, he was ignorant of the fact that the outcome had already been decided. While he was celebrating his apparent victory, he was oblivious to the fact that what Jesus was doing on the cross and in the tomb was destroying him. Oh, he still puts up a fight, but his fate was sealed that day at the cross. At the cross Satan was defeated. At the cross, the battle was over. At the cross the war had been won.

But as victorious as the cross was, we cannot not stay at the cross. If we stop at the cross, we miss the best part. Yes, Satan was defeated at the cross, but for Jesus, there was another giant to face. There was another enemy to conquer. The enemy of death, and it would be a formidable foe.

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery says... *“Death is the greatest of humankind’s enemies, a relentless Grim Reaper that shows no respect for age or wealth. It robs parents of a precious child, leaving them to mourn the loss for the rest of their lives. It deprives wives and children of their breadwinner and protector.... It takes away an aging spouse, leaving a... senior citizen without a lifelong companion and closest friend. Sometimes it arrives suddenly and unannounced; at other times it approaches slowly, as if stalking or taunting its helpless victim. Sometimes it hauls away its victims en masse; on other occasions it targets individuals. It uses a variety of methods and weapons, but only rarely does it capture its prey without inflicting pain and terror. Power, beauty and wealth can usually overcome any obstacle, but in death they meet their match.”* (p. 198).

That is the kind of enemy Jesus faced. So He didn't stop at the cross. But would He have power over the enemy of death?

All the signs said "yes." Jesus had resisted all of Satan's temptations. He had driven out his demons. He had demonstrated power over death before when He brought a widow's son back to life. Then He did the same for Jairus' daughter. And later when He raised Lazarus from the dead, calling him out of the tomb, grave-clothes and all!

So it seemed that death would be no match for Him. For centuries death was an enemy from which no one could escape. But Jesus came along and asserted His authority over it. Maybe death's awful sting could finally be overcome!

But now, things were different. This time Jesus Himself was put to death. The one who raised people to life had now been raised up on a cross. Now it seemed death would prevail after all. But the reason we're here today, is because death didn't get the final word. So we must move past the cross to find the real message of Easter -- the empty tomb. And that is why we celebrate Resurrection Sunday. Today we celebrate the highest point and the culmination of Jesus' ministry. Today we rejoice not just in the fact that that Jesus came to earth. Not just in His miracles of healing. Not just in His teaching and not merely that He died. But we rejoice in the fact that He conquered death.

As the hymn says: *"I serve a RISEN Savior, He's in the world today. I know that He is living, whatever men may say. I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer, And just the time I need Him He's always near. He Lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!"*

Easter is when we celebrate in a special way the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The message of Easter tells us that love is stronger than hate - that hope is stronger than despair - that life is stronger than death.

And because of the living Christ, He promises to be with us when we come together to worship. But the best part is because of the living Christ, He is with us in our hearts for all eternity. The resurrection makes that possible.

The resurrection is the reason we are a church. This morning, I want to draw your attention to a passage of Scripture that was written to the early church.

The book of Revelation was written during a time when the church was undergoing severe persecution because of their loyalty to Christ. The author, John himself was in exile on the isle of Patmos. Faithful Christians were being martyred, and more persecution was on the way. The church was becoming disillusioned and depressed to say the least. These words in chapter 1 were written to just such a group. Here we find the promise of the indwelling presence of the risen Christ.

READ Rev. 1:10-13; 18-20. I want to point out a couple of thoughts. If you are here today and you're thinking that Satan has a grip on you and won't let go – if you're thinking there is no hope for you. If you're wondering if God can come through for you, then I've got good news for you. The reality of the resurrection is that the living Lord has defeated your two greatest enemies. Notice first, that:

1. The Grave Could not Hold the King (18a)

After Jesus' death, some of Jesus' faithful followers, some women came to anoint His body after the Sabbath. They found the stone rolled away and the body of Christ missing. Vs. 4-6 says, "*While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!..."*" **Luke 24:4-6 (NIV)**

The resurrection of Christ is the one event which separates Him from all the other religious leaders. When they died, they stayed dead. Their tombs still contain their remains. But Jesus' tomb is empty. Jesus was not merely a historical person who we admire. He is alive and has authority over death and the grave.

We don't just talk about who He was; we talk about who He is. You see, His life on earth was only a part of His existence. His life didn't begin in Bethlehem, or end when He died on the cross. He is the Living One.

At Christmas, we saw where Matthew recorded the words of the prophet Isaiah who called our Lord "*Immanuel*" which means "*God with us.*" (**Mt. 1:23 NIV**). And He still is "*God with us.*" John saw Him as "*the Son of Man*" who was "*among the lampstands,*" which are symbolic of the churches. Jesus is in the midst of the churches. In the person of the Holy Spirit, He lives among us and within us. We're not separated by time

or space. He is right here with us, and accessible to us. He sees our every move. He knows when we're hurting. He knows when we're grieving. And He cares for us in the worst of times.

When John saw Him in the midst of the churches, He was there as the ruling Lord. He is the One with the authority. He is the King. During His earthly ministry Jesus was the King over disease, the King over demons, and the King over despair. On Easter, we see that Jesus is the King over even death. The grave couldn't hold Him. He's alive today!

Is He alive in your heart today? Is He living in you right now? The second reality of the resurrection tells us why the grave couldn't hold the King. It's because:

2. The King Holds the Keys over Death. (18b)

In vs. 18b, Jesus says, *"And I hold the keys of death and Hades."* In vs. 17, Jesus told John, *"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last."* In other words, *"John, there's nothing to be afraid of, I've been there from the beginning, and I'll be there until the end. John, because I live you can face whatever lies ahead because I hold the keys of death and hell."*

Of all our enemies on life, these are the worst of the worst. Of all the things we have to be afraid of, these are the most fearsome. But in the resurrection, Jesus demonstrated His power over man's ultimate enemies. **2 Timothy 1:10 (NIV)** says, *"but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."*

Folks, Jesus didn't avoid death. He didn't fake death. He didn't cheat death. He didn't just escape death. He destroyed death. He conquered death! Amen? Hallelujah!

Can you see what a difference the resurrection of Christ makes? It's the difference between life and death. It's the difference between hope and despair.

He holds the purchase price of our salvation. He holds the key to unlock the dead out their tombs. **Acts 4:12 (NIV)** says, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* He holds the key to death, but there one key He does not hold. He doesn't hold the key to your heart. You do. Only you can open the door and let Him in.