

CONQUEST CONFIRMED AND ANNOUNCED

Matthew 28:5-6; Mark 8:31; 9:31; John 2:19; 10:17-18; 12:31; Acts 2:23-24; Hebrews 2:14

This is Resurrection Sunday. The attendance on this day in churches here and around the world is greater than any other day in the year. Whatever the time zone, when the worship time comes on this Sunday, people fill churches to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is what we are doing here today. I am glad that you are here to participate in the celebration

This is a day of worship that ought to be filled joy and hope. As we worship, I want us to fully understand what we are celebrating, lest we miss its significance.

We celebrate special days and occasions all during the year. Sometimes we do it in conjunction with the church and other times apart from the church. But so often with these other days and occasions, we are so far removed from the actual events that are the reason for the celebrations, that we lose some of the significance of them. For example:

Thanksgiving. We are so far removed from the events that spawned our Thanksgiving Day that we have lost much of its significance. Do we understand that our Thanksgiving celebration goes back to the Pilgrims, who were Puritans, who paid an incredible price to get to the new world so that they could worship God freely? In the midst of God's blessing through their incredible journey of hardship, they gave thanks. Today, Thanksgiving for us is a big meal, parades and football.

Christmas. When we gather in churches at Christmas, is the incredible gift of God's Son, wrapped in human flesh central in our thoughts, or is it gifts, shopping, decorations and eating? The thought of a loving God sending His Son in human flesh to live among us and die for us is staggering. We have basically turned that event into a commercial extravaganza. Removed from the actual event, we can lose the significance of the event. In fact, there is pressure today to separate the celebration from the actual event. The words "Happy Holidays" is to be substituted for "Merry Christmas"

July 4th. When we celebrate the 4th, are we conscious of how our nation began, do we know enough to appreciate the struggle for independence with its cost of lives, or has the event basically become for us hot dogs on the grill, ball games and fireworks?

When we are removed from an event, we can lose the significance of what we are celebrating.

So we have come to Resurrection Sunday or what many call Easter [first believers knew nothing of Easter—it was for them a Resurrection event]. This is a day of great, spiritual significance. But do we fully understand what we are celebrating and why we are celebrating? Or has this significant event been reduced to rabbits, eggs and the time for a spring break?

Our worship celebration today is tied to an event over 2000 years ago when the tomb of Jesus Christ was found empty. That is the crucial thing about the grave of Jesus. When folks checked on it that Sunday morning, it was empty. The main thing about the tomb was that it was empty. The enemies and opponents of Jesus said it was empty. The women who went to the tomb on Sunday morning said it was empty. The disciples who went to the tomb found it empty. The angels who sat at the tomb said it was empty. It was empty, because Jesus was alive.

Jesus repeatedly told His disciples,

"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." [John 2:19]

"No one takes it [My life] from Me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." [John 10:18]

Then the angels at the tomb said to the women who found the tomb empty on Sunday morning,

"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, Who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said." [Matthew 28:5-6]

Jesus was alive. As the word spread that He was alive and as the confirmation came of that, people celebrated His resurrection. Today, we are doing the same.

I want us today, amid all the other things that are now a part of Easter, to understand that we are here to celebrate a Risen Savior. In doing that, I also want us to understand the significance of

Resurrection Sunday. I think we have a tendency to understand the Resurrection differently from what we find in scripture. Why do I say that? Because I think we see Jesus Christ as the Conqueror on Sunday, when, in fact, He was the Conqueror on Friday.

Obviously, it is easy to look at the condemned Jesus, denied and deserted, dehydrating and dying on a cross and not see a Conqueror. It looked like pure defeat. If there is victory, it is in the pride, prejudice, hatred and brutality expressed against Him. It looks like evil has triumphed over good. But that is not the case. The very opposite is true. Good is triumphing over evil. Jesus was the conqueror on Friday. He had come, wrapping Himself in human flesh, so that He could die. He willingly chose to die for us. Death was the penalty of sin. Although He had no sin—we do. He chose to pay our penalty. The reason there is death is because of sin. It separates us from God. So the way to defeat death is to defeat sin which causes death.

Today is one of the greatest days in history. It is a day of rejoicing and celebrating. But as we celebrate today, I want us to understand that we are not to regard the cross as defeat and the resurrection as victory. Rather, the cross was the victory decisively won, and the resurrection is the victory confirmed and announced.

The scripture says that Jesus defeated on the cross the one who wielded the power of death.

Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death [Hebrews 2:14].

How did the devil have the power of death? Because he lures us to sin and by the sin we are separated from God. He knew that if we died as we are, we would die apart from God. The devil had the weapon to separate us from God. But, if you have a superior weapon, then the lesser weapon is rendered ineffective. Jesus' death on the cross was the superior weapon. It was like a stick against a tank. He paid the penalty for sin. As a result, sin, and the death it brings, were conquered.

That is why we can call Friday, Good Friday. Why else would you call it good? You can't unless you understand Friday as the day of conquest. You can't unless you look beyond the horror of crucifixion to the purpose of God. There was victory on Friday.

What were you doing on Friday? Did you realize that it was Victory Day?

Understand that the Conquest, which actually had been in process, became decisive at the cross. When Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God, victories were being logged. Herod tried to kill Jesus in his dragnet of death. He failed. In the wilderness, the devil tried to disqualify Jesus as the Savior. He failed. On certain occasions the crowds tried to throw Jesus off a cliff or make Him a political king. They failed. When Peter tried to get Jesus to side-step the cross, Jesus refused. He failed. As Jesus went about the countryside, the lame walked, the blind were made to see, the hungry were fed, the dead were raised and people were forgiven. The conquest had been going on. But the conquest was final and decisive at the cross where sin was defeated.

So, the victory over death did not happen on Sunday. The victory over death happened on Friday. The victory over death did not happen at the grave. The victory over death happened on the cross. The resurrection is the powerful, visible sign that death has been conquered. The resurrection confirmed the conquest and announced it. The death of Jesus and His resurrection go together—the conquest and the conquest confirmed. Jesus always linked them.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and after three days rise again [Mark 8:31].

He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him, and after three days He will rise" [Mark 9:31].

"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross. But God raised Him from the dead, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him" [Acts 2:23-24].

You see here how the resurrection fits in. After Jesus defeated death on the cross—because he defeated sin which causes death—death had no power to hold Him. The Bible says that God raised Him. The Bible also says that Jesus took up His life.

“The reason my Father loves Me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” [John 10:17-18]

The Resurrection confirmed that death had been defeated. Death could no longer hold Jesus Who defeated it. The Resurrection confirmed that Jesus had the power He claimed to have. The Resurrection confirmed that Jesus was the Son of God. It confirmed what Jesus had promised [Matthew 28:6—“just as He said”]. The Resurrection confirmed and announced the victory over sin and death.

But why did Jesus take on death and the devil? Was it because He wasn't going to let the devil wield this power anymore? Yes. Was it to prove His superior power? Yes. But we need to understand that He did it because He loves us. God made us to love Him and to be with Him. He lost us. He lost us to sin. He came to get us back. It took the cross to do that. He took our death—paid for our sin—so that we could live.

What would be tragic today is to celebrate what Jesus did and not benefit from it personally. People acknowledge that Jesus died on a cross, wear a cross around their neck, commemorate that by going to a church service, but never benefit from it personally. People believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, commemorate it by going to church on Easter Sunday, but never benefit from it personally.

Why did Jesus do what He did? Because He loves you. He paid the penalty of your sin. He wants you to be forgiven. He wants you to live. He doesn't want you separated from God. He wants you to experience death as a door into the presence of God. Then one day, He wants you to experience your resurrection.

These events were for us. Are you benefitting from what He did? At some point you have to take hold of the lifeline. You have to accept what Jesus did for you and trust Him. He did all of this for us. It is now your move. Don't celebrate the events and miss the significance of them.

I need forgiveness of sin, because I am a sinner. I need death defeated because I die. All that I need is available through the One Who conquered. Take the gift that He offers.