

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

The Gospel of Easter

Presented by John Edmondstone

Good morning. There has been a question in the minds of men and women since time began. "If a man die shall he live again?" Today is Easter Sunday, the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. In the early Church Christians greeted each other with the words, "Christ is risen! And back would come the reply, "He is risen indeed!" That certainty answers the question in the human heart, 'if a man die shall he live again?' The answer is a resounding yes if he or she has put their trust in all that Jesus Christ went through on a cruel cross in our place. Our theme this morning is the Easter Gospel, "Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!"

We are examining the resurrection of Jesus this morning and its meaning for us. First let me quote some words of Peter from the book of Acts chapter 10 from verse 39, "we are witnesses of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen."

Now let us turn to the words of St. Paul which I urge you to read. In the New Testament, 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 12 "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are found to be false witnesses," and he adds, "if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile You are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only in this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

Then this "But now is Christ risen from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep ... For as in Adam all die so in Christ all will be made alive." 'In Christ' means all who believe in Him, all who are committed to Him, all who daily live for Him. And to this must be added the list of people who saw the risen Christ.

In Matthew chapter 28 we are told two of the women went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. It was very early in the morning on the first day of the week. But the stone covering the tomb had been rolled away and an angel, dressed in white, sat on it. The angel said, "don't be alarmed – you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go and tell His disciples and Peter, He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you."

Then you will recall the two on the walk to Emmaus who were overtaken by a stranger who asked what they were talking about. They explained what had happened to Jesus and their belief and hope that He was the promised redeemer and what the women had discovered at the empty tomb. The stranger was of course Jesus. He explained everything to them. They invited Him into their home where they realized who He was. He left them. They hurried back to Jerusalem, found the disciples and told them the good news that it was true that the Lord had risen and had appeared to Simon." That record is found in Luke chapter 24 from verse 13.

There are other records in the New Testament equally convincing about His rising from the dead. He appeared to doubting Thomas in John 20, and in John 21 to Peter who earlier had denied knowing Him. By the lakeside the risen Jesus appeared to him and asked “do you love me?” With heart well nigh breaking, he confessed his love for the risen Christ not once but three times. The resurrection of Jesus is one of the best attested facts of history.

Now I want to suggest the meaning of the resurrection for us today. The Easter Gospel is good news about *The Integrity of Christ*. In the letter to the Romans, chapter 1 we read, “declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead.” God’s seal was set on His entire life and teaching. It was on the Cross that He purchased the salvation of mankind, but it was the resurrection that made it known. The resurrection confirmed the integrity of His life and mission and confirms He was the Son of God.

When conducting funeral services, I often read from the 14th chapter of John’s gospel, the words of Jesus, “let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God believe also in Me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also.” If the passion activity ending with the cross had been all there was, how could we be sure He had indeed gone to His Father, as He said He would? Yes, the resurrection clinches His claim to Divinity.

“No traveler returns,” said Shakespeare’s Hamlet, referring to the undiscovered country beyond the grave. But One did return. Jesus rose. He was seen by Mary. He was seen by Peter, then by the rest of the disciples. After that He appeared to over 500 of the Christians at once and last of all to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus even after His ascension. Doubt was dispelled, Faith fostered, His integrity established. So we can joyfully sing “no more we doubt Thee, Glorious Prince of Life.” But there is something else. The Easter gospel is not only good news about who Christ is. It is also good news about the forgiveness of sins. Our pardon was bought at the Cross, but it was proclaimed by the resurrection. It is Easter that makes Him a present Saviour now.

When Paul wrote to the converts at Corinth, he reminded them of the stark alternative – chapter 14 “If Christ is not raised,” he told them, “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins”. There is no hope and any hope of forgiveness is a delusion. But Paul thunders, “but now is Christ risen from the dead.” The promises are true, *our sins are forgiven*, they do not have dominion over us – but there is more to come.

Let me take you to another truth of the Easter Gospel of the risen Christ. *It is good news about the hope of heaven*. The resurrection has opened the way to life eternal. As scripture reminds us, “as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). For those who believe, death has no sting and judgment no terrors. Their prospect is life with Him forever. One day He will come again to claim His own. Apart from Easter, such hope is groundless. But the resurrection of Christ gives us certainly. I have, on numerous occasions, stood by an open grave or in a crematorium at the funeral of someone I know to be a Christian, one who believed in Christ and owned Him as their Saviour and repeated these words of Jesus from John 14. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going. Thomas said to him, “Lord we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” That’s the Easter Gospel of the resurrection.

The Easter Gospel is good news about the integrity of Christ, about the forgiveness of sins and about the hope of heaven. But this will mean nothing unless you know Christ to be your loving Saviour and Lord. It

is not a fable we are concerned with this Easter season but a fact. It is a fact of history, but it is also a fact of experience. Do you know He lives because to you He is real?

This morning we have celebrated the resurrection of Christ. He rose triumphant over the grave and is alive for evermore. That's why across the world will echo the words, "He is risen!" "He is risen indeed will come the reply." Today, let Him into your life or reaffirm that belief and find a place, a church, where you can worship with people of like mind.

Dear Father, thank you for your great love in giving your Son for us, may we today with glad hearts worship the risen ever living Christ.