

Easter Sunday Sermon
March 27, 2016
Mark 16:1-8
Christ Defeats Death, Sin, and Hell
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Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our Lord Jesus is risen from the dead. Death, which conquers everyone is defeated when Jesus took his first breath since giving up his spirit on the cross on Friday. Of course, Jesus had to be raised from the dead. As St. Peter preached on his Pentecost Sermon, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” (Acts 2:23-24)

“It was not possible for him to be held.” It was impossible for death to keep its grip on Christ. The grave could not hold him. Jesus must rise from the dead.

To understand this, you must know who Jesus is. What kind of a person is Jesus? First of all, Jesus is true God. He is the only begotten Son of God from all eternity, God of God, light of light, very God of very God. Death cannot hold God.

Secondly, Jesus is a man, born of the Virgin Mary. Yet, unlike every man who ever lived, Jesus is without sin. Every human being is guilty of sin. Christ is innocent. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) “Death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12) Yet Christ did not sin, so he did not earn his wages. Yet, he got paid. Death spread to the one and only innocent man, who ever lived.

Christ Jesus is true God and true man. He is not half God and half man. He is entirely God and entirely man. Yet, he is not two persons, but one person. Everything Jesus does, he does both as God and man. When Mary gave birth to the Christ-child, she gave birth to God. When she nursed her child and rocked him to sleep, she cuddled in her arms the Almighty God, who created the heavens and the earth. Likewise, when Christ healed the sick and even raised the dead, he did this as a man. When he walked on

water, a true son of Adam thwarted the laws of physics. So also, when Christ remained obedient to God, resisting temptation perfectly, he not only did this as God, but as our brother, sharing our flesh. So when Christ Jesus was raised up on the cross after being flogged and beaten, our God suffered the pain, and the blood of God poured into the ground. As that Good Friday hymn declares, “O sorrow dread! Our God is dead, Upon the cross extended. There His love enlivened us As His life was ended.” St. Peter, himself, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, confronted the crowd that crucified Jesus a few weeks later saying, “You killed the Author of Life.”

Christ had to be true God to save us. He had to be true man to save us. If he were not true God, his death would be insufficient to pay for our sins. Psalm 49:7 states, “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him.” Yet, Christ says of himself, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) Since he is God, Christ’s death is greater than all punishment for sin. This shows us the incredible love God has for us. The hymnist expresses it, “O wondrous Love, what have you done! The Father offers up his Son, desiring our salvation. O love how strong you are to save, you layed the one into the grave, who built the earth’s foundation.”

Christ had to be true man to save us. Without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness of sins. And the wages of sin is death. Those wages needed to be paid in full. Christ takes the place of all mankind and is our substitute, the righteous one in exchange for the unrighteous ones. (2 Peter 3:18) Christ’s human body, soul, and will in perfect obedience suffered for your body, soul, and will. Your salvation is fully accounted for.

Now that we see who the person of Christ is, what office he holds and what kind of man he is, we see that our sins, death, and hell are puny compared to him. What crime could demand the death of God? If you were to multiply the sins of the world by a thousand, could they balance the scales against Christ’s

death? Death took its poison when it bit into the flesh of Christ Jesus. No powers could keep the innocent Christ in the grave.

So what good does this do you? Why do we celebrate this day? Because Christ's resurrection does you incredible good! Jesus didn't rise from the dead for his own sake. He didn't stand before Pontius Pilate and endure floggings and nails for himself. Neither did he rise from the dead to return to heaven alone, without any prize. Christ's resurrection from the dead benefits you! It saves you! You could not save yourself from your sins. Your wages are long overdue by virtue of your transgressions against the law. And death is greater and more powerful than you could ever be by your own preparation. So for you to be saved, to thwart death, to live forever, someone else must do it *for you*. Christ is greater than your sin. He is stronger than your death. And hell cannot contain him. And he is that someone, who has saved you. Christ's resurrection from the dead is proof that his death truly outdid death and sin.

Are you troubled by guilt? Does a particular sin plague you? Are you concerned that you can't be forgiven? Satan tries to convince you that your offense is too great to be forgiven. He'll convince you that your sins are greater than Christ himself. But that is pure nonsense—a lie of the devil. Christ is greater than your sin. His death is greater than your death. There is no misdeed for which Jesus did not fully pay in his death. To believe the lie that your sin is too great to be forgiven is to deny the power of Christ. Jesus is true God. He is the holy Christ. He cannot fail to forgive sin. When he died he nailed all your sins to the cross and canceled your debt. (Colossians 2:14) His resurrection from the dead proves that your sins are all forgiven.

Do you fear death? Does the unknown on the other side of the grave haunt you? Christ has made your grave holy. He has prepared it like one makes a bed. Death had free range over all mankind, because all sinned. Death had free range over all mankind, except Christ Jesus. When death devoured Christ, he lost his sting and was swallowed up in victory. Christ Jesus is greater than death. He is greater than your

death. His resurrection proves his power over death and as St. Paul writes, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Christ’s resurrection give you victory over death itself.

Unless our Lord returns first, you will die. Yet, because of Christ’s death your death is temporary. This is proven by the resurrection of Christ Jesus. Hell cannot threaten you, because Christ is greater than hell as well. And Christ has paid the wrath of God’s judgment for all sinners..

For this reason we celebrate Easter. Not out of some meaningless tradition. We celebrate this day, because it is the most significant event in world history. And it benefits us today. Your sins are forgiven, because of what Christ has done. Easter declares to you that you will live forever with your Savior. The Easter proclamation is worth more than all the gold in the world. It is more precious than a million lifetimes, because it gives eternal life to all who believe. So, believe it. Believe that your sins are forgiven. Believe that you have eternal life in Christ. And don’t stop celebrating Christ’s resurrection, hearing his word continually, receiving his Sacrament often, and believing that even these gifts today benefit you with the power of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Savior.

Amen.