

God's Servant Rises

Mark 15:40-16:13

In the 1950s a famous British pastor W.E. Sangster began to notice some concerning symptoms in his body. One leg was dragging and his throat did not feel right. Medical tests led to the diagnosis of an incurable muscle-wasting disease that would ultimately take his life.

Sangster responded by throwing himself into the work of God. He figured that as the disease progressed, he would serve the Lord by writing and praying for as long as God gave him. He prayed, "Let me stay in the struggle Lord. I don't mind if I can no longer be a general, but give me a small regiment to lead." He made up his mind to use whatever little ability that God gave him to do something to worship the LORD and advance His name.

A day came when his legs became useless and his voice completely stopped working. But he could still hold a pen. On Easter morning just a few weeks before he entered his eternal home, he wrote a letter to his daughter with his now shaky hand. In the letter, he wrote, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, "He is risen!" **but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not WANT to shout."**

Friends, if you are born again, the Spirit of God moves within you. And if you are filled with His Spirit I know that you WANT to shout, "He is risen!" So if you are filled with the Spirit of God this morning, let us do that!

I will say, "He is risen." And you can respond, "He is risen indeed!"

Allow me to review the story recorded in the Gospels that tells us of this wonderful work of God in raising His Son from the dead.

It was 3 pm on a Friday. Jesus had been hanging on that cruel cross for the past six hours. He

THE STORY

As we read the four Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection, we discover a number of variations by each witness and yet none of the differences are irreconcilable.

On Friday, sometime after 3 pm, the crucified body hangs dead upon the cross. Normally, criminals would be taken down by the Roman soldiers and buried in pauper graves in the Hinnom Valley. But a wealthy man who was a respected member of the Sanhedrin **boldly** ask to Pilate for permission to care for the body

of Jesus. **Pilate hears Joseph's request and is surprised to learn that Jesus is already dead.** He summons the centurion who supervised the crucifixion to ask for confirmation. And the centurion assures Pilate that Jesus had indeed died. So Pilate gives Joseph this honor of caring for Jesus' body.

This man's name is Joseph and he is from the town of Arimathea which is about 25 miles away from Jerusalem. He has been a secret disciple of Jesus for some time. He believes Jesus to be the King who would bring in the kingdom of God.

Yet he has lived in fear that his belief in Jesus as the Messiah would be discovered. He knows that he would suffer much if this is made public. And up to this point, he was not ready to take that risk.

Joseph's request for the body of Jesus is an act of faith and courage. After all, he is part of the group that plotted for Jesus' death.

Yet now, Joseph does not care if his belief in Jesus is made public. The cost may be great to him, but his faith has grown in the last six hours. **He is more convinced than ever that Jesus is the Messiah.**

Joseph possesses a new tomb in a garden very near and adjacent to the place of the crucifixion. He purchases a new linen shroud with which to wrap the body of Jesus. **Joseph goes to the place where Jesus hangs upon the cross in order to take Jesus' body down from it.**

This is hard work and must be done before 6 pm when the Passover Sabbath begins. Jesus needs to be buried before sunset when the Sabbath begins.

Joseph enlists another member of the Sanhedrin who is also a disciple of Jesus to help him. This man's name is Nicodemus. He also is born again.

Nicodemus and Joseph take the body of Jesus down from the cross. How do you take a body from a Roman cross? I am not sure. But it likely was not easy. They may have had others help them. But we are not told.

They wash the bloody body of Jesus then lay Him upon the linen shroud. Nicodemus brings 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes as burial spices. **They wrap the legs, arms and torso with linen cloths filling each layer with the spices.**

After preparing the body of Jesus they take it to the tomb that Joseph had purchased. **This tomb is cut out of the rock.** No one has used it before. **The tomb's entrance has a chamber where a shelf is cut from the rock.** After placing Jesus' body upon that shelf in the tomb, a huge stone is rolled over the opening.

While they are doing all this, some of the women from Galilee, among whom were "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses" (Mark 15:47; Luke

23:55) **look on as Nicodemus and Joseph prepare Jesus' body and transported it to the tomb.** They see where Jesus was laid.

The next day, the Sanhedrin convene an emergency session of the religious leaders. This was REALLY unusual because it is the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders remember that Jesus had predicted His own resurrection. They needed to take steps to make sure that did not happen! ☺ **Interesting that Jesus' disciples did not remember this promise, but Jesus' enemies did!!**

And so the religious leaders march off to Pilate again. They insinuate to Pilate an uprising if people believe Jesus has risen from the dead.

Pilate does not like these guys. He curtly gives consent. **"Take a guard and make as secure as you can."** **Saturday ends with the guard and the seal securing Jesus' tomb from any tampering.** Every safeguard is now made to prevent the sign of Jonah!

Early Sunday morning while it is still dark, **four women rise to go to the tomb of Jesus in order to cover Jesus' body with more spices.** As they walk toward the tomb, they wonder who will help them roll the huge stone away from the opening. They know that it is so large that they will not be able to do that on their own.

Meanwhile, at the tomb, an earthquake occurs and an angel from heaven comes and rolls the stone back and sits on the stone. His appearance is like lightning and his clothes are white as snow. The guards at the tomb are battle-hardened men, but they tremble in the angel's presence. Fear grips them and they become as dead men. Still dazed, they see that the body of Jesus is now gone! And they run off to the chief priests to make a report.

The women arrive now at the tomb. They see the stone rolled away. Trembling, they rush into the tomb and see a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe. Their hearts skips a beat as they expected to be alone inside the grave.

The "young man" is an angel sent from the Lord with a message for them. He says, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. Look here is the place where they laid Him. It is empty. Go now and tell His disciples . . . especially Peter . . . that He is going before you to Galilee. He will meet you there and you will see Him . . . JUST LIKE HE TOLD YOU."

The stunned women slowly back out of the tomb. They then turn and run as fast as their legs can carry them. Their hearts race with wonder and fear. They say nothing to anyone they meet, but run to find Peter and the others. **On their**

way to tell the disciples Jesus meets these three women personally to calm their fears. They fall down before Him and worship Him. Jesus, being God in flesh, receives their worship.

“Do not be afraid” **He says.** “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see Me.”

From this point, Jesus makes 10 more appearances to over 500 witnesses. These fearful, timid, cowering disciples become men of courage who are willing to die for their resurrected Lord Jesus. The church of Jesus begins 40 days later on Pentecost and spreads through the whole world. Christians everywhere now worship God, not on Saturday as was the Jewish custom, but on Sunday to give praise to their Lord who bodily rose from the dead on Sunday morning.

Central Idea: Jesus is risen! The resurrection of Jesus blesses us every day with treasures that feed our soul. Let us worship Him, live for Him and tell others of Him!!

Six Treasures that Jesus’ resurrection delivers:

Treasure #1: God validates our faith.

How do I know that what I believe about God and the Gospel is true? Short answer: The resurrection of Jesus.

Truth: The resurrection of Jesus is not an idea to be debated, but a historical fact to be reckoned.

The resurrection validates our faith because it is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s prophetic word. The resurrection was promised BEFORE it happened. **Matthew records Jesus promising His own resurrection on 6 different occasions!**

The resurrection of Jesus validates our faith because it proves that Jesus is God come in the flesh. He alone possesses power over man’s strongest enemy.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that

repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:44-47 [ESV](#))

How do we know that Jesus is who He says He is and that it is not foolish to give our lives to obeying and worshipping Him? The empty tomb validates our faith!

Remember Thomas' doubting? He was not present when Jesus appeared to the 10 so when they reported Jesus' resurrection to him he said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." John 10:25

Think for a moment how discouraging this must have been for the 10 to hear! Just three days earlier, they had lost Judas their friend to unbelief and suicide. Now it seems as though Thomas is moving in same direction! He is giving himself to the same soul-destroying unbelief.

Thomas looks past all the evidence that God had given him to believe in Jesus: Bible prophecy, Jesus' words, the empty tomb and the testimony of 10 friends who saw Jesus. Thomas is becoming determined in his unbelief.

Friends, let us learn from Thomas how easily unbelief can invade our soul. Let us learn from Thomas how thoroughly unbelief can harden us to God and His truth! Unbelief is on the verge of destroying Thomas' soul. Thomas was a committed disciple, yet his soul is under tremendous temptation to yield to cold unbelief.

APPLICATION: Unbelief is a real enemy that is closer to us than we think! We must take opportunity to strengthen our faith daily with the grace God supplies.

Let us awaken ourselves to the evidence that God gives us each day of His presence and truthfulness! **We do not know when a trial will come that tempts us to give in to unbelief.** Notice how patient and kind Jesus is to restore the soul of one who is giving himself over to unbelief.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" John 10:26-28

The resurrection of Jesus turns a doubting heart into a decisive one! Perhaps some of you are like Thomas this morning. Please look upon the resurrected Jesus: Do not let unbelief destroy your soul!!

It is true that God does not give each of us the opportunity to put our fingers inside Jesus resurrected hands and side. But He has given us a bounty of proof of His resurrection!

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:29

Jesus is not calling us to believe WITHOUT evidence or contrary to our senses. But **He is calling us to believe on the basis of the evidence that God abundantly supplies to us.**

God gives us the evidence of eye witness accounts, the evidence of the empty tomb, the evidence of the changed lives of the apostles and early believers, the evidence of the written history recorded and preserved for us in scripture, the evidence of the early saints martyrdom and persecution, the evidence of the Holy Spirit's power to establish the church in a world of paganism and unbelief. **This evidence and much more is sufficient for us to believe.**

We cannot physically see Him, but we can find Him if we seek for Him with all our heart. Will you?

"Blessed are you who have not seen and yet have believed." I do not know ALL the forms of blessing that God may give. Some of them include forgiveness of sin, adoption into His family, the future resurrection of our bodies, a fruitfulness of life, a joy inexpressible, a home in heaven, a daily communion with God, a victory over sin, a hope in trials, freedom from the fear of death and a satisfaction in life that sustains. **I do not know all the forms of blessing that come to us because we believe, but I do know that believing in the resurrected LORD Jesus will bring blessing into your life every day.**

Treasure #2: God transforms our burial grave.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, the burial grave is a place of despair. The boast of a tomb is this, ***"Once you enter here, you will never leave."***

But Jesus' resurrection silences that boast! He crushes death's power. When He leaves the grave, Jesus does not limp out in exhaustion from a nearly lost fight with death. He does not leave the tomb looking worn-down and beat up. His victory over death is a quick knock out punch. Jesus' power brings a swift end to Death's reign. Jesus leaves the grave refreshed in power and glory. **Jesus is THAT KIND of Victor!!**

Jesus' resurrection silences the boast of the grave! **In Jesus' resurrection, the grave takes on new meaning for the believer. The grave is no longer a place of defeat and despair, but a place where a future resurrection happens.**

I was talking with my five-year-old granddaughter. And the subject of death came up in our conversation. My 2-year-old granddaughter heard the word death and she began to speak very loudly to me to get my attention, **"Uncle Jim . . . heaven! Uncle Jim is in heaven. He died. But Uncle Jim heaven!"** She was speaking of my brother's recent death. And I stood in wonder at God's goodness in using the resurrection of Jesus to change the way a two-year-old thinks and feels about the death of a beloved uncle. It was like she was preaching to me a message of hope.

We are right to look at the grave of a believer with new perspective.

Truth: The grave that now holds the body of one whom we love is a place where the power of Jesus' resurrection will explode in glory on the day He returns for us in the clouds.

Treasure #3: God frees us from the power of death.

Death is often illustrated as a skeleton with a cloak and sickle in his hand and a mocking grin upon his face. *"My grave is permanent. Once your dear ones enter their voice is no longer heard, their touch no longer felt, their laughter no longer enjoyed. My victory is in reaching each person . . . no one escapes my blade, not rich or poor, not powerful or lowly. Every minute that passes every person moves closer to my sharp blade."*

"You want to know the power of my grave? Ask the child whose mom I have taken. Ask the mother who aches for her son's sweet smile. Ask the husband whose wife of 50 years no longer sits at his side."

Jesus' resurrection puts an end to death's boast. Jesus' resurrection shouts back, *"Death, your grave is a temporary place for the bodies of My own. It is a Momentary residence until the day of GLORY. O death, you SAY you have a hold over my children? It is NOT so. For my dear one is alive in spirit right NOW and I their body soon follow."*

O Death, you SAY you drain life from the body of my beloved ones? No, you can only put it to sleep . . . a sleep from which it will awaken refreshed, restored, in power and in glory!!

O Death, you SAY that you take from my children comforts, companions and joys? That is NOT true. For you simply open the gate for them to experience joys inexpressible at My side.

O Death, for all you take and take and take, I, the resurrected LORD Jesus, give and givs and give!!

“Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:54–57 ESV)

Death is “swallowed up in victory.” Death no longer has power over any person who is in Christ. Death has no power to create despair. Death has not power to have the final word.

Illustration: The Inland Taipan is one of the most poisonous snake on our planet. A person bitten by it has 30 minutes to 6 hours to live if left untreated. The poison in one bite is enough to kill 100 adult men. Good news . . . it likes to keep to itself in the inland desert of Australia. By contrast, the Garter Snake resides here and most of us have come across one in our yards at some point. Good News, while a Garter Snake has a few rows of small teeth to bite with, the bite may pinch us but it is not poisonous to us.

For the unbeliever, death bites like an Inland Taipan. For the believer, death bites like a Garter Snake. The bite of an Inland Taipan brings not only pain, but hopeless dread. Without outside intervention, the bite is the least of the problems. The bite leads to suffering and ultimate loss. The bite of a Garter snake may hurt for a moment, but the pain of the bite is the end of its power. After the initial bite, it has no more power to bring us loss. The person bitten does not dread the next hour or day or week. The person bitten continues to move forward in strength and joy.

Point: Jesus’ resurrection pulls the Poison out of the Death’s bite. Death still hurts. But there is no more evil that follows its bite. Instead the bite leads us directly into our eternal home where we wait for our bodily resurrection. For all these in Christ, glory and power follow death. Jesus’ resurrection guarantees our grave will one day be empty too!

Truth: The more we know and embrace Jesus and His resurrection, the less fear and despair we experience in the face of death.

We miss our loved ones . . . sometimes with an ache so deep that it is indescribable. **What do we do when we feel the terrible pain of the bite of death? We grieve upward with hope.** We still hurt and mourn, but we take our sorrow to the empty tomb of Christ . . . and we declare, *“Death, you do not have the final word. Jesus died and rose again! You are a defeated enemy. My sorrow will become singing. We will be raised with Christ and will forever be with our Lord!”*

Jesus is risen!! Death MUST give back its prey. Death WILL NOT have the last word . . . not upon our souls and not upon our bodies.

Let us SING this truth with joy and gladness and let us rejoice in Him who defeated death for us once and for all.

D.L. Moody told the story of a soldier who was shot and then was able to crawl back to his tent. When he was later found, he was lying face-down, his Bible open and his hand stuck by blood to one of the pages. *Then his hand was lifted, the verse his fingers rested upon was John 11:25, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, yet shall he live.”* Moody said, **“I want a religion like that, which can comfort even in death and can unite me with my loved ones.** What gloom and darkness would settle upon this world were it not for the glorious doctrine of the resurrection!”

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6 [ESV](#))

Treasure #4: God guarantees a resurrection body.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22 [ESV](#))

D. L. Moody told of a young 15-year old girl who was dying from a severe and sudden illness. The family doctor whispered to her family, “She has seen her best days, poor child.” She heard him say this and she quickly corrected him, **“No**

doctor, my best days are yet to come, when I shall see the King in His beauty.”
Her hope rested in the Risen Lord Jesus!

“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed . . . (1 Corinthians 15:51-52 ESV)

Treasure #5: God restores us to His eternal purpose.

I love that God ordained for the women to go tell the disciples and specifically Peter that Jesus would meet them in Jerusalem. Remember how discouraged about life they were. Mission over. No real future ahead of them.
When Jesus meets the disciples, He tells them that life is not over for them. He gives them something to live for!

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:14-16 [ESV](#))

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

The resurrection teaches us that our life here on earth matters. Yes, it is short. Yes, it is feeble. Yes, it is filled with things that are passing away. But because of the resurrection, our lives CAN MATTER for all ETERNITY!

Jesus tells the story of the rich landowner who planned to build bigger and bigger barns to store all his crops. He longed to get to the point in his life where he could say to his own soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

Truth: How foolish to live life as though there is not resurrection from the dead. How wise to invest our life for that which never ends.

Illustration: Rope. With red tape.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58 [ESV](#))

What will your resurrection day be like? We have opportunity to manifest the life of Jesus in our mortal flesh through our words and service to Him. What joy we forfeit when we treat these bodies as though they were given to us to invest in things that are passing away!

I know that we will get discouraged by many hardships in our service to the LORD.

- People will treat us roughly even as we try to love them.
- People will overlook us and not appreciate our sacrifices.
- Often it will seem like so little fruit comes from our labor.
- We will feel our own inadequacy and Satan will whisper, "Look at how you have failed the Lord. You are not qualified to serve Him."
- Our body will grow tired in the process. We will feel stress.
- We will endure painful trials that weaken our resolve.
- We will enter into and experience the heartache of others sins. We will feel the weight of the destruction other's sins bring upon themselves and others.

In spite of all this, the resurrection of Jesus speaks to us! Your labor in the Lord is NEVER empty!

HE IS RISEN!!

Treasure #6: God secures us completely.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:10 [ESV](#))

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5 [ESV](#))

Because Jesus rose from the grave all His promises to us are guaranteed.

Jesus often promised that He would die and rise from the dead (Six times in Matthew). If He did not deliver on this promise, we could not trust Him for any promises that He makes. BUT if He did fulfill this promise, what promise is too hard for Him? His resurrection proves that we can trust every one of His promises.

One of those great promises is His promise to keep us safe all through this life and to preserve us in our salvation.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."
(John 6:38–40 ESV)

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:27–28 ESV)

Do you ever feel weak and wonder if you can hold on to Jesus through a world of trials and temptation? Look to Christ for your confidence. Do not look to your own resolve but to Him who demonstrated His power in His resurrection. If He can rise from the dead, He can keep you safe. Cling to Him!

Jesus' resurrection guarantees that His ministry to us continues throughout our lives into eternity. He keeps us even from stumbling and presents us faultless to Him with exceeding joy.

Illustration: R. A. Torrey tells of four men who were climbing the Matterhorn. One was a guide, the other three tourists. All were roped together. On the way, the lower tourist lost his footing and began to fall into an abyss, then the next tourist fell with him and then the third. But the guide in the lead drove his ax into the ice, braced his feet and held fast. The three who were dangling gradually found their footing and went on up the mountain successfully.

So it is for the Christian. We are ascending an icy, treacherous slope. The first Adam lost his footing and tumbled into an abyss. Then one generation after another of mankind all lost their footing too. All was lost for everyone. But the Guide, the Lord Jesus, held fast. All who are united with Him are safe, not because of their skill and expertise, but because of His!!

Truth: Our security does not depend upon us, but on Him who promised to keep us. His resurrection guarantees that He is able.

Are you lashed to Jesus today?

What joy is ours! He is Risen! (He is risen indeed!)

Six Treasures that Jesus' resurrection delivers:

Treasure #1: God validates our faith.

Treasure #2: God transforms our burial grave.

Treasure #3: God frees us from the power of death.

Treasure #4: God guarantees a resurrection body.

Treasure #5: God restores us to His eternal purpose.

Treasure #6: God secures us completely.