

Sermon 4-21-19
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The Resurrection of Our Lord

The 600 and The Spirit

There is a war of words that began in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. According to Luke's gospel Luke 19:37-40, "37 When he [Jesus] came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' 40 'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'"

Tell me. What could possibly make inert stones shout? Only their Creator. And that was the radical message Jesus proclaimed. The Creator of heaven and earth had come to Israel, the people He called His own, to Jerusalem, the city of God.

But the Pharisees could not understand the radical prediction hidden in plain sight in their own Scriptures – that the uncreated, self-existing, immortal, eternal God would come as a created, dependent, mortal human being. They could not and did not understand the ancient prophecies concerning Messiah. And really, that's not surprising. Uncreated and created contradict each other. So do immortal and mortal. It's like stones crying out. Impossible! Yet, what were the disciples praising God for? The thousands of impossible miracles they had seen. Could this be the Son of God?

The war of words escalated when Jesus personally drove out of the temple the moneymaking racket the religious leaders had set up. The Scripture does command that the animals sacrificed to make atonement for sin be perfect. God didn't want any seconds. And God commanded the priests to inspect the animals to make sure they weren't seconds. Well, in Jesus time, for a price you could buy a pre-inspected, guaranteed (or your money back) animal for sacrifice. And, since only genuine Jewish money was acceptable as an offering in the temple, again, for a price you could exchange your Roman daily business currency for real Jewish currency.

Jesus expelled this racket from the temple declaring the message spoken six centuries earlier in Jeremiah 7:11, "Has this house, [the Jerusalem temple] which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD." In reaction, the Jewish leadership then engaged Jesus in a war of words wanting to know by what authority He had done this.

Jesus responded by giving them a question in Luke 20:4, "John's baptism – was it from heaven, or from men?" He was really asking them about Himself. My ministry – is it from heaven or from men? But instead of Himself, Jesus focused them on John the Baptist. The leaders refused to acknowledge John's baptism as heaven sent, and so they pleaded agnosticism – "we don't know." In return Jesus refused to tell them

by what authority He was acting. But then again, Jesus had openly said many times that He was sent by the Father.

In parables Jesus then went on to tell everyone that He is God's rightful heir. By right, we, and all of Creation belong to Him. And in parables Jesus described the rebellion that humanity has been in ever since Adam and Eve first listened to the fallen angel, Lucifer. In parables, Jesus predicted that the people of Jerusalem would reject Him and kill Him. But He also openly predicted that He would rise from the dead as God's heir.

In order to understand the work of Jesus Christ, we have to understand that Yahweh, the uncreated, eternal Creator gave this universe to His beloved Son, Adam. Adam and His wife, Eve, were both created in the very Image of God. This means they were as devoted to their Creator as He is to them. They were as righteous as Yahweh Himself. They were in complete agreement with Yahweh, calling good what Yahweh calls good. What we recognize as evil did not even enter their minds. Most importantly, in the image of God they were not their own gods, deciding good and evil for themselves. No. They were absolutely content in the Image of God.

But another of God's creatures, Lucifer the angel, had become discontent. How, we don't know. But Jesus called Lucifer a liar and the father of lies. Indeed, he is the ultimate source of every word spoken against Yahweh and contrary to Yahweh. Lucifer is the author of the war of words.

And so with lies and words of deception Lucifer convinced Eve that she shouldn't be content in the Image of God. There was something else to reach for – being like God, knowing good and evil. What Lucifer really meant was that Adam and Eve should become like him, a rebel who believes, speaks and lives words contrary to Yahweh's Words of life. He meant, they should claim earth for their own, set up shop as their own gods, decide good and evil for themselves, abandon Yahweh's Word and live by their own words. Eve fell for Lucifer's words and so did Adam. And so that's how things are here. That's how we are. Every last one of us seeks to create a good for ourselves as we see fit. Don't you know that this is even the point of a suburban neighborhood like this – a patch of green that we alone control? But just as everywhere else on earth, even here one person's good is not necessarily their neighbor's good. Within our households, within our organizations, within our politics, even in the church there is struggle over whose version of the good will prevail. This is what makes us sinners before God. For, there is only one good that should prevail in every aspect of life – the will of our Creator.

We know much of our Creator's will through His commandments. And at the head of the list is the command to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and spirit. All the other commandments are predicated on this one. But, of all the commandments, this is the one we fail at most consistently and with the greatest amount of rebellion.

If you want to know just how much rebellion you have, consider how you react to this: Yahweh is your King. You are His. You must bow your knee to Him and live a holy life just exactly as Yahweh is holy. That's what Scripture commands.

See what I mean? That resistance you felt, as did I, is the sinful nature. We would much rather run away from Yahweh and do our own thing. And should Yahweh come in person to claim us as His own, there will be a big rebellion – even a

crucifixion. Indeed, the resistance of the sinful nature is the very thing that brought Jesus to the cross. In the crucifixion of Jesus Christ every human being who has ever lived or will live turned their back on their Creator and wanted Him dead – you and I included.

Yahweh knew this would happen when He sent His only begotten Son into the world. On the very day Adam and Eve sinned, Yahweh prophesied that His Son would have to take the deadly bite of the serpent in order to crush the serpent's head. And a thousand years before Jesus, six hundred years before Jesus Yahweh prophesied through His prophets that His Son would be rejected and suffer death for the sins of humanity.

Indeed, the rebel angel, Lucifer, used us to put the Son of God to death. But he failed. For, Yahweh so set things up that by putting the Son of God to death in our rebellion, we actually broke the power of the rebel Lucifer over us. Go figure that weirdness. But that's Yahweh.

In Yahweh's righteous justice, it is necessary that all rebellion be paid for. Therefore, all rebels who hate Yahweh and desire to have nothing to do with Him will get exactly what they want. They will be entirely shut out of Yahweh's presence for all eternity. And permanently separated from Yahweh and His goodness they will descend into an everlasting evil and rebellion as deep as that of Lucifer himself. It's known as hell. It is the reward of rebellion.

Now, Jesus who had no rebellion in Him put Himself forward to pay the eternal penalty for all human rebellion. Being the divine Son of God as well as a human being, born of the Virgin Mary, He has both the position and power to do this. Being the Son of God, His death atones for all sin and rebellion – even that of the bloodiest mass murderers in history. His death atones even for our sin and rebellion. This is how Jesus broke the power of Lucifer over us.

And there was one other important component. When Yahweh prophesied the work of His Messiah, He established a pattern that had to be perfectly obeyed by a human being. The Messiah would have to endure death by piercing – in this case the horror of crucifixion. The Messiah would have to shed His blood to atone for the rebellion. He would have to suffer and die for the sake of His people.

At several points in Jesus' three-year ministry, Lucifer sidled up to Him by various means and invited Jesus to run away from the cross by exercising the likeness of God rather than the Image of God that was His. Thus, Jesus faced the same temptation Adam and Eve had faced. But Jesus stayed firm, even going through the torture of rejection, an excruciating flogging, a terrible crucifixion and death. And when taunted by Lucifer through his enemies to come down from the cross and show them all, Jesus obeyed the Father unto death. In this way, Jesus completely won the war of words with Lucifer and accomplished Messiah's mission to set God's people free from their rebellion.

The event we celebrate today, Jesus' resurrection from the dead, confirmed His success in the war of words. Resurrection from the dead to an existence of immortality and perfect righteousness was and remains Yahweh's reward for perfect obedience. Keep this in mind because we'll see how this applies to us.

Now, as we have noted many times, Jesus' crucifixion and death took place publicly. Anyone in Jerusalem that day could see it and did see it. However, His

resurrection from the dead was not an event open to the public. An empty tomb and a missing body were available to all members of the general public. But, the honor of seeing the resurrected Jesus in His immortal and totally righteous body was reserved for a select few over a forty-day period. Paul testified that 500 saw Jesus at one time. Jesus appeared to the eleven and to the one who took Judas' place, Matthias. Jesus appeared to various other disciples and last of all to Paul. So perhaps a total of only 600 people had the privilege of seeing and handling the first human being with an immortal body.

Therefore, Yahweh has set things up so that everyone beyond those 600 who has ever believed in Jesus as the Messiah has had to do so on the basis of the testimony of the 600. This was just as true in 33A.D. as it is now. On the Day of Pentecost 33A.D., 3,000 men believed in Jesus Messiah. None of them saw the resurrected Jesus. Rather they had to believe the testimony of the 600. It was exactly the same for all those who have believed up to our time. It is true for us and for all who will come after us. To believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the testimony of the 600 must be believed.

Now, is such belief possible in 2019? Yes. In the same way it has always been possible. Two things must be determined. First, has the record of Jesus' resurrection been faithfully transmitted to us in the written record? Second, were the witnesses of His resurrection telling the truth?

Many excellent minds have pondered these questions. And the available evidence has been enough to convince even hardened skeptics in our time that Jesus was indeed resurrected from the dead. We don't have time this morning to go into the testimony of someone like former atheist newspaper reporter, Lee Strobel, or former atheist retired cold case detective, Jim Warner Wallace, or former atheist student David Wood. But each of these people followed the available evidence to its logical conclusion. We, in fact, do have a reliable written record. Jesus' disciples and apostles were telling the truth. Indeed, that's also how I see it.

But valid testimony from reliable witnesses is not enough to believe in Jesus as Messiah. After Pentecost of 33A.D. there were plenty of people in Jerusalem who could not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, even though they were extremely close in time to the actual events and heard the testimony of the then living eyewitnesses. Why?

Yahweh has arranged things so that two things are necessary to come to Christ. First, we need to hear of Jesus the Son of God given for us. Second, Lord Holy Spirit must come to us personally in the depths of our beings and convince us of the truth concerning Jesus. Otherwise, we continue our courses as rebels.

But for those who are converted by Lord Holy Spirit to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, there is a new path in life. Its reward is the same immortality and righteousness with which Jesus was rewarded. The difference is that we rebels cannot win this reward on our own. Jesus had to win it for us, as only the Son of God could do. This is the marvelous grace of God. When we were in rebellion and in spite of our rebellion, Yahweh the King loved His people so much that He gave His only begotten Son that we might have life in Him and have it abundantly.

The truth is that being rebels we don't naturally love Yahweh, our King. We would rather be our own gods. Nevertheless, our King loves us beyond all

comprehension. Through the cross of His Son, Yahweh proclaims Himself absolutely dedicated and committed to us. For, we crucified Jesus. Yet, on that cross, Jesus won the battle for us against sin, death and the power of old Lucifer. That is God's Amazing Love.

So, what say you, Lord Holy Spirit? Having heard again the good news of Messiah's love for us, will you convince us that we are indeed rebels and sinners in great need of Messiah's grace and forgiveness? Will you bring your gracious deep truth into the hardened layers of our lives, even now, or perhaps later today? Will you open us up in utter gratitude and thankfulness for our Creator's undying love for us? Lord Holy Spirit, in the absolution, we heard this morning from John 1:12 that through You we are able to receive Jesus and believe in His Name and thus be given the right to become children of God. Will you, therefore, bring us to faith that we have truly been made children of God by the forgiveness of our sins in the Name of the resurrected Messiah Jesus? Come Spirit. Bring us to faith in our resurrected Savior's Love. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.