

ROM 10.9: JESUS IS THE RISEN LORD! CELEBRATING FAITH IN THE RESURRECTION *Chelmsford Easter Day (23 March) 2008*

“**God raised Jesus from death**” – that is the message of Easter Day.
Easter is not about eggs or chocolate bunnies, it is not about daffodils or Simnel cakes – or rather they are but the trimmings – they are not at the heart of Easter.

*Tell me [wrote the poet Steve Turner]
What came first
Easter or the egg?
Crucifixion or daffodils?
Three days in a tomb or four days in Paris?
(returning Bank Holiday Monday).*

*When is a door
Not a door?
When it is rolled a\way.
When is a body
Not a body?
When it is risen.*

*Question.
Why was it the Saviour
Rode on the cross?
Answer
To get us to the other side*

*Behold I stand
Behold I stand and what?
Behold I stand at the door and
Knock, knock.*

Easter is about resurrection - it is about God raising Jesus from the dead.
It is about Jesus defeating the powers of death
Jesus is Victor, Jesus is Lord!

Easter is not about imagination – it is about reality
Easter is not about parable – it is about history

In Assisi, in the great basilica, are the bones of St Francis.
In Durham, behind the high altar, are the bones of St Cuthbert.
But in Jerusalem, under the great rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre, you find only an empty tomb.

Yes, Easter does beggar belief – it is amazing – it is extra-ordinary.
But it is about God – for it was “**God**” who “**raised Jesus from death**”; and when God is involved, anything and everything is possible.

The resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of the Easter message.
And the resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of Christian believing

“*No resurrection, no Christianity*” (Michael Ramsey). It’s as simple as that.
The resurrection is not an optional extra to Christian believing.
The resurrection is of the essence of the Christian faith.

Or as Paul put it when writing to the church at Rome: “**If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved**” (Rom 10.9).
There you have Christianity in a nutshell. It is precisely because of his resurrection that Jesus is Lord.

“**Jesus is Lord**” – he has beaten the powers of sin and death.
Many people think that death is the end.

That was certainly Gustav Mahler’s thought when in his ‘Song of the earth’ he set to haunting music a Chinese drinking song:

*“So strike the lute and drain the glasses,
These are the things that go together.
A full goblet of wine at the right time
Is worth more than all the kingdoms of the earth
Dark is life, dark is death”*

HG Wells, the English novelist, had a similar view of life: “*I am a temporary enclosure for a temporary purpose; that served, my skull and teeth, my idiosyncrasy and desire, will disperse, I believe, like the timbers of a booth after the fair*”.

Job, in one of his soliloquies, had an equally bleak view of death: “**There is hope for a tree that has been cut down; it can come back to life and sprout... But people die, and that is the end of them**” (Job 14.7,10).

But the good news of Easter Day is that death is not the end.
Death has been destroyed – death has lost its sting – for Jesus has risen from the death.

Listen to the Apostle Paul writing within 20 years of the resurrection of Jesus. “**The truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised... Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ**” (1 Cor 15.20, 57)

Yes, God raised Jesus from the dead – and as a result the iron gates of death have been broken down. In the words of the Oxbridge don CS Lewis: “*Christ has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because he has done so*”.

Or to use another metaphor: just as once a hole has been made in the North sea defences, and the sea comes rushing in, so once a hole has been blown through death’s defences, life comes flooding into the world’s wide graveyard.

Jesus is Lord – he is Lord even of death itself.
Death no longer has the last word – for Jesus in rising from the dead has defeated death itself.

But to return to my text, the Apostle Paul declares: **“If you confess that ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved”**.

In other words, if we want to share in Christ’s victory, then there are two things we must do

1. BELIEVE GOD RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD

“If you believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved”

In the first place, we must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Read the Gospels - examine the evidence of the empty tomb – and consider too the stories of those who claim to have seen Jesus.

Strange as it may seem, the evidence is incontrovertible. As Lord Darling, a former Lord Chief Justice, said: *“In its favour as a living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in the verdict that the resurrection story is true”*

But to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead is more than simply believing in a one-off miracle. It also involves believing that in Jesus we too may share in his triumph over sin and death; it involves believing that the crucified and risen Lord Jesus is the one who can deal with all our past failures and put us right with God.

A little earlier in his letter to the Romans Paul wrote: **“Because of our sins he was handed over to die, and he was raised to life in order to put us right with God”** (Rom 4.25). That is what we are called to believe.

We are called to believe that because God raised Jesus from the dead, the Cross was no accident, but rather was God’s way of dealing with our sin.

To believe that Jesus died and rose is to believe that in Jesus our sins are forgiven, and that in him there is hope of life for us too.

Yes, to believe that Jesus is the Risen Lord, is to believe that he, and he alone, is the true and living way to God.

In the words of Jesus featured on our banners on either side of the baptistery: **“I am the resurrection and the life”**.

“Because I live”, Jesus said to his disciples, **“you too may live”**.

This is what we are called to believe.

What’s more we are called to believe it with all that we are

Literally Paul wrote: **“If you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”** (NRSV). We are called not just to believe with our minds, but in the very deepest recesses of our being.

Or as one modern version puts it, we are called to embrace *“body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead”* (Peterson)

2. CONFESS FAITH IN JESUS AS LORD

“If you confess that Jesus is Lord... you will be saved”

We are called to give outward expression to our inward conviction.

Almost certainly the Apostle Paul had baptism in mind.

For it was in baptism that the first Christians confessed their allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. There in the water they confessed **“Jesus is Lord”**,

In a few minutes I shall ask Steve and Sarah, *“Do you profess repentance toward God and faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord”*. .

Baptism in NT terms is the occasion when faith goes public.

It is the moment when we identify ourselves with Jesus.

As we go under the water, we declare: *“I believe Jesus died for me”*

As we come up out of the water, we declare *“I believe that Jesus rose for me”*

And because he died and rose for me, I now resolve to die to self and live for him.

Jesus is Lord – he is not just Lord of the world or Lord of the church, he is my Lord.

In baptism we confess our faith in Jesus

In baptism we act out faith – that is why we use a lot of water - gallons of it in fact.

But the key is not the quantity of water, but the quality of faith.

Steve and Sarah have thought long and hard about today.

They first came to this church on an Alpha course – and for ten weeks they examined the claims of the Christian faith.

As we shall hear from each of them, after careful consideration they came to the point where wanted to give their lives to the Lord who loved them and gave himself for them.

They have come to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead – and today they want to publicly declare their faith in Jesus the Risen Lord.

As I come to the end of sermon, let me ask the question: Where do you stand?

In our church magazine *Connect* I wrote: *“We are all passengers on the Titanic – for the journey of life on which all of us has embarked is a journey which leads to death. Don’t be misled by the statistic that of the 600,00 who die every year most are over the age of 75. It doesn’t matter how young you may be, death will one day catch up with each one of us. Death and income tax are the two certainties of life”*.

But death need not be the end. God raised Jesus from death, and in so doing offers life and hope to us all.

But we need to respond to this offer of life and hope.

Jean de la Fontaine, the 17th century French poet and fabulist, once wrote: *“Death never takes the wise man by surprise, he is always ready to go”*. Are you?

To return to Steve Turner’s poem which I quoted toward the beginning of my sermon:

Question.

Why was it the Saviour

Rode on the cross?

Answer

To get us to the other side

*Behold I stand
Behold I stand and what?
Behold I stand at the door and
Knock, knock.*

The poem alludes to some words of the Risen Lord Jesus found in the last book of the Bible: **“Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in”** (Rev 3.20).

The Risen Lord Jesus wants to come into your life and mine – he wants us to experience his forgiveness for the past, and to know hope for the future.

The question is: will we allow him to come in?

Are we prepared to believe that in him there is life.

“If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved”.