

### **Isaiah 65:17-25**

<sup>17</sup>“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

<sup>18</sup>But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

<sup>19</sup>I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.

<sup>20</sup>No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

<sup>21</sup>They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

<sup>22</sup>They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

<sup>23</sup>They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their children with them.

<sup>24</sup>Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

<sup>25</sup>The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD.”

### **Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24**

<sup>1</sup>O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever! <sup>2</sup>Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures for ever. <sup>14</sup>The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. <sup>15</sup>Hark, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly, <sup>16</sup>the right hand of the LORD is exalted, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!” <sup>17</sup>I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. <sup>18</sup>The LORD has chastened me sorely, but he has not given me over to death. <sup>19</sup>Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. <sup>20</sup>This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. <sup>21</sup>I thank thee that thou hast answered me and hast become my salvation. <sup>22</sup>The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. <sup>23</sup>This is the LORD’S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. <sup>24</sup>This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

### **1 Corinthians 15:19-26**

<sup>19</sup>If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup>For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

### **Luke 24:1-12**

<sup>1</sup>But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came unto the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. <sup>3</sup>And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup>And it came to pass, while they were perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel: <sup>5</sup>and as they were affrighted and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup>He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>saying that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. <sup>8</sup>And they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returned from the tomb, and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now they were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James: and the other women with them told these things unto the apostles. <sup>11</sup>And these words appeared in their sight as idle talk; and they disbelieved them. <sup>12</sup>But Peter arose, and ran unto the tomb; and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen cloths by themselves; and he departed to his home, wondering at that which was come to pass.

### **The Holy Bible, American Standard Version**



## **Children's Sermon:**

Easter is the most holy day of our Christian year. We often color Easter eggs and go on Easter egg hunts at this time of year.

Many years ago, the Ruler of Russia (Czar) asked a jeweler to make a special Easter egg for his wife. He wanted an egg that was very beautiful and one that had a surprise inside.

The jeweler, a man named Faberge, made a lovely enameled egg for the Czar's wife that was painted with wonderful designs and pictures and decorated with gold, silver, and jewels. (Show picture of a Faberge egg.) The first egg he made had a golden yolk and inside the yolk was a golden hen and inside the hen was a tiny diamond crown and hidden inside the crown was a tiny ruby egg.

The Czar's wife was so pleased with the gift that the jeweler, Faberge, continued to make one Easter egg for the Czar's wife every year. Most of these eggs have been saved and are in a collection. They are the most famous of all Easter eggs.

Do you know why we decorate eggs to celebrate Easter?

An egg is a symbol of new life. Baby chicks, baby ducks, and other types of birds hatch out of eggs.

Easter is all about new life. Jesus died on the cross and two days later when three women went to his tomb he was not there. Two men in dazzling white clothes, probably angels, told them that Jesus was no longer dead. He was alive and was going to heaven to be with God.

Because Jesus died on the cross and then arose to be with God, each one of us is given new life. Easter eggs remind us of the new life that is possible when we choose to accept and celebrate God's love.

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## Back From the Dead

He rose out of an obscure beginning and made a tremendous impact on his nation. Crowds of people gathered wherever he was, clamoring to get close to him and hear him. The authorities felt threatened; it seemed like all the old familiar ways were changing. Families argued and fought over what he did. Those devoted to him felt that a new era had begun.

Then, well before he reached old age, he died a tragic death. His abused body was laid to rest. All the joy he brought, all the good times, came to a crashing end. Those closest to him were lost in grief. So were many others that knew of him.

But before long rumors started to circulate that he was still alive. People familiar with his appearance said they saw him in one place, then another. He always took them by surprise, utterly by surprise.

Who is this, who had such a tremendous impact, died before his time, but was reported alive again? You may think I'm talking about Jesus Christ, but I'm really talking about Elvis Presley! At one time he was the cause of national controversy. He came to a terrible, pathetic end. And now stories keep circulating that he has come back from the dead.

I personally don't believe the reports of Elvis are real. But they do point to something significant in the psyche of the American people. You can call people who have had these experiences crazy - fringe elements who act out the secrets of our society: its needs, its wants, and its crises.

The so-called appearances of Elvis also raise a question for Christians. What difference is there between a risen Elvis and a risen Jesus? Is the Man from Mississippi on a par with the Man from Galilee - because both are said to have come back from the other side? Can we dismiss the Elvis reports and keep the Easter story?

The men at the tomb said to them, *"Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise."* And they remembered his words, and

returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

An American vacationing in Mexico was strolling along the beach outside his hotel in Acapulco, enjoying the sunny, warm Mexican weather. Suddenly, his attention was seized by the screams of a woman kneeling frantically in front of a small child, and by the now gathering crowd of natives and tourists.

The man knew enough Spanish to realize that the child had swallowed a coin. Rushing into the circle of people, the man - without thinking - grabbed the child by the heels, held him upside down and shook him violently. After about a minute, an American quarter popped out of the child's mouth.

The woman who had been screaming, obviously the boy's mother, was overcome with gratitude. In the best English she could muster she said, "*Oh, muchas gracias, señor!*" "*You seemed to know just how to get the coin out of him. Are you a doctora?*"

"*No, senora,*" the man replied sheepishly, staring down at his shoes, "*actually, I work for the Internal Revenue Service.*"

According to the old saying, the only two constants in this life are death and taxes. But maybe we should question the truth of that statement. You see, two thousand years ago a Jewish carpenter from Nazareth was crucified by the Romans for sedition. His body was wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in the borrowed tomb of a friend. The tomb was sealed, and Roman soldiers were placed to guard the entrance to prevent his corpse from being stolen.

And three days later, this Jewish carpenter from Nazareth, Jesus, son of Mary, and Son of God, was resurrected from the dead. If that story is true - and I am telling you it is - then maybe death isn't what it used to be. If this man came back from the dead, maybe He has the power to bring others back from the dead. Maybe, death is dead. Maybe the only constant left in life is taxes.

It all hinges on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If He didn't really rise from the dead, then Jesus was a liar, the Bible is fiction and

Christianity is the most inviting and persuasive but evil scam ever perpetrated on the human race. Let's be clear: There really isn't a middle ground, a place for ambivalence, or much wiggle room. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead cannot be true for me but not true for you, or true for him but not for her. It claims to be a historically verifiable event occurring in space and time, like the invention of the telephone, or the sinking of the Titanic.

Either the resurrection is true, or it is false. If it is false, then the eleven disciples of Jesus died the death of martyrs in vain, the early Christians who were fed to lions in Roman coliseums threw their lives away for nothing, and the Christians being persecuted today around the world are suffering for a lie. Because they all believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. People will suffer and die for all sorts of silly reasons, but a lie they know to be a lie isn't one of them. Paul puts it rather well in First Corinthians:

*If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those who have died in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:16-18).*

But what if it's true? What if Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead? Well, then, this resurrection has profound, cosmic, universal and personal consequences.

Can we know? I think so. It is as simple as weighing the likelihood of the resurrection against its alternatives. As outrageous as the resurrection sounds, the alternatives require a greater exercise of faith than simply believing that the resurrection of Jesus is true.

We know Jesus lived and died. Apart from the Gospels, secular contemporary Roman records verify that much. But did He rise from the dead? Perhaps the disciples just hallucinated and thought they saw Him resurrected. The problem here is that you must believe that hallucinations happen to groups and not just to individuals. Moreover, at the writing of his First Corinthian letter, the Apostle Paul was able to produce over 500 people who had seen Jesus back from the dead.

Maybe Jesus didn't really die on the cross. Perhaps he simply slipped into a coma, and the soldiers thought he was dead. Possibly the cool air of the tomb revived Jesus, he came from the tomb and His disciples saw Him and said He had been resurrected. The difficulty here is that you must ignore three important facts. One, the Romans were masters at crucifixion, a form of capital punishment they invented. Two, Roman soldiers who botched crucifixions were themselves crucified. And three, we know from John's Gospel that the soldiers broke the legs of the two other men who were crucified with Jesus, and a soldier thrust a spear into Jesus' side, all to ensure that the three victims that day were indeed dead.

Could it be that the disciples went to the wrong tomb, found it empty and proclaimed Jesus had risen from the dead? The hitch here is that it isn't just an empty tomb which is the primary evidence for the claim that Jesus Christ is alive today. It is His resurrected body. The disciples and the women who followed Jesus in His earthly ministry saw Him put to death, helped to bury Him and three days later encountered Him walking and talking and eating. Moreover, they willingly sacrificed their lives rather than deny that they had seen Him alive from the dead.

Maybe the disciples conspired together to propagate a hoax. Chuck Colson, the former Nixon advisor who did jail time for his part in the Watergate break-ins, tells how difficult it is to keep a cover-up going. Colson said that when the news media began investigating the Watergate break-in, all of President Nixon's top advisors got together and agreed to the same story, the same dates, the same facts, all to protect the president.

Yet, Colson says, as soon as the media scrutiny began in earnest, every one of them folded like a cheap suit. Colson's point is this: If six Harvard and Yale educated men could not withstand media scrutiny to protect the president of the United States, how likely is it that 11 Galilean fishermen could withstand torture, imprisonment and death to cover a hoax concerning an obscure, itinerant Jewish rabbi. No. As incredible as the resurrection seems to us, the alternatives are even more incredible.

Granting then that the resurrection is true, or if you are skeptic here this morning, granting the *possibility* that it's true, what does it mean?

Something this unusual, this momentous, must have a profound and important meaning. It does. For Jesus Christ the resurrection means two things. For us, it means three things.

For Jesus the resurrection first of all means that His sacrificial death on the cross was accepted by the Father. He cried from the cross, *"It is finished!"* That was not a whimpering whisper but a triumphant shout. What was finished? The pain of crucifixion? No. What was finished was His work of redemption.

*"The son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many,"* Jesus said in Mark 10:45. Jesus died on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. And we know that God the Father accepted His sacrifice because He resurrected Jesus from the dead.

In his sermon to the Greeks on Mars Hill in Acts 17, the Apostle Paul says this: *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31).*

For Jesus the resurrection second of all means that He is who claimed to be. The Jews wanted Jesus crucified because according to them, He was making himself out to be the Son of God, and equal with God. And they were right. He was. The only thing is, He was only declaring Himself to be the Son of God because He really was. Over and over throughout His public ministry, Jesus said that He would be handed over to the Gentiles, put to death, and after three days rise again. If He was right about that, it stands to reason that He was right about his identity as well. Indeed, who else but the Son of God could manage to come back from the dead?

But what does the resurrection mean for us?

Firstly, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead means a death to sin. You can have a new life. Paul writes in Romans 6:

*Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus*

*were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

Someone said that the best sleep aid is a clear conscience. But maybe you're here today and you don't have a clear conscience. Maybe you need forgiveness. Maybe you need a fresh start. Maybe you need a new life.

Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. The consequence of that for all who come to Him by faith, as Paul notes, is new life. *"Whoever is in Christ is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new."*

The powers of sin and guilt and the curse of judgment have been broken. *"I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly,"* Jesus said. *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

Secondly, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead means a death to hopelessness and a birth of hope. Peter writes in his first letter: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (I Pet. 1:3).*

There is a lot of study being done these days on the differences in generations. The baby boomers are different from the Gen-Xers. The Gen-Xers are different from those in Gen-Y. Regardless of their differences, what is clear is that if you could put a sign over the present generations, it would read: *"No hope within."* The collapse of man's great hope in science, the relativism of truth, increased violence, the cheapening of human life, the denial of any notion of transcendence or objective moral norms have all combined to create a hopeless generation; a generation of young people who are persuaded that nothing, finally, has any meaning.

The resurrection has created new hope for those who have put their trust in the Resurrected One. With the discovery that the heavens are not empty or silent, and that there is a God who loves us and has a purpose for our lives, and with the realization that it was unfathomable love which took

Jesus to the cross, life takes on new meaning. Heartache has a purpose. Troubles come with a companion. We are never against the wall, but are instead leaning on the everlasting arms.

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”* The resurrection of Jesus gives us a real, living hope, because we know that with this God, crosses are always followed by resurrections and empty tombs. We can dare to hope because we know that with this God, Good Fridays are always followed by Easter Sundays.

And thirdly, the resurrection of Jesus Christ means a death to death. Paul tells us how it's going to all end up. In First Thessalonians. 4 he says:

*But I do not want you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have died, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who are dead in Jesus...For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be in the Lord.*

The ancient Greek Stoic philosophers used to say the fearing or mourning death was silly. Their formula was this: When I am, death is not; when death is, I am not. But it isn't that simple is it? Death is a tragedy. It takes our loved ones from us, seemingly destroys all the progress made in a lifetime, and ends the only existence we know.

But the resurrection of Jesus means that death has lost its power. The Lord said that he was the resurrection and the life. And that whosoever believed in him would live, even though he die; and that whosoever believes him will not die forever.

If the resurrection was true, then it follows that who Jesus claimed to be, and what he said, must also be true. Death is done. It is now a temporary inconvenience for those in Christ. We will bury our loved ones. And we will be buried. But they, and we, will rise again. Because Christ was raised, all

those united to him by faith will also be raised. You've got God's word on it, and the resurrection of Jesus is the proof.

The only things certain in this life are death and taxes? I don't think so. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, the only thing certain in this life is resurrection and eternal life for those who put their trust in Jesus Christ.

After John demonstrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ in his Gospel, he writes: *These things were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.*

That's what the resurrection was about—life. A new life now. A new hope now. And eternal life yet to come.

Each of us probably came to church this morning because at some level we feel a hunger for meaning in our lives. We want a savior who is real. We want to believe that miracles do happen. It is important to be here on this, the greatest Christian feast. But Easter is not one morning only, or even the church season that extends for 50 days. Easter is a way of life.

The resurrection of Jesus demands a response. And that response is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Romans 10:9-10 St. Paul says,

*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

Coming to Christ is a matter of 1) Acknowledging your guilt and your need; 2) Asking Jesus to be your Lord and Savior; and 3) Accepting the free gift of everlasting life purchased for you on the cross and ratified for you by the resurrection. Jesus is the Son of God. Believe and receive. Today.

AMEN.