

HE IS RISEN!

The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is arguably the most significant single event in the history of the world. I'd grant one could add to that list the Son of God coming to earth as a baby and, without a doubt, His death as the once-for-all atonement for our sins. But His resurrection demonstrated that He is faithful in fulfilling His promises, He has infinite power even over death, and He reigns as our living Savior today for all people and for all eternity. As the centurion stated, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54), and if any single event confirmed that, it was His resurrection.

Can you imagine what it must have been like to be in Jerusalem that Passover weekend? All the events spoken about in the gospels—the anguish of seeing Jesus on the cross; the darkening of the sky as the sun was eclipsed that afternoon; His last words giving up His spirit at the same time the Passover lambs were being sacrificed at the temple; the earth literally trembling in the form of an earthquake; the tearing of the temple curtain signifying God's anguish over the death of His Son while also declaring the amazing reality that mankind now has direct access to God. Then a solemn day of mourning and uncertainty for His disciples, followed by the shock and awe as the big news spread that He had risen and had conquered death. Have the words of Psalm 30:5 ever been more true than on that morning? "Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise His holy name. For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." Wow! Let's just agree it was at least the most significant weekend in the history of the world.

When considering the reality and logistics of the resurrection itself, there are a couple of locations that have been identified as potentially being the tomb where Jesus was buried. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem has traditionally been recognized as containing both the site of Jesus' crucifixion and His tomb. Inside one of the church's rotundas is the "edicule"—a small chapel with a shrine that purportedly sits directly over the location of the tomb. But there is also another location about 1,000 yards away, aptly named the "Garden Tomb," where others believe Jesus' body may have resided for that short duration. Was Jesus' tomb one of these locations, or somewhere else entirely?

We had the privilege of visiting both sites during our trip to Israel in 2023, and two things occurred to me as we stood in those spaces. First, was that archaeologists struggle to declare exactly where Jesus' actual tomb is because, wherever it is, it's empty. (I know that isn't a deeply insightful or astute revelation to most, but I found new uncanniness in that fact as I stood there.) They've never been able to exhume a body because He's not there! Imagine that—an empty tomb. But second, I found although being in the vicinity of wherever Christ was laid triggered a reflection and ponderance of the gravity that my Savior suffered and died, there was something else in my heart as well—an unspeakable joy knowing it really didn't matter where the tomb was, because, again, He's not there! The angel's words to Mary resonated with me anew: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!" (Luke 24:5b-6a)

It's interesting to consider the historical facts of Jesus' resurrection and to revel in His power and victory, but does it extend further than that? As significant as the resurrection was, it's important to note that it didn't mark the end of the story. What are the practical implications for each of us in this 21st century?

First, we are invited to not only acknowledge Jesus' death and resurrection but to participate in it. Listen to how Paul describes this in Romans 6:4: "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may

live a new life.” We are invited to identify with Christ, His death and resurrection through a spiritual baptism by accepting Him as our Lord and Savior, and in doing so, we have the promise of a new, fuller life.

But there’s also a second invitation: Go! Jesus never intended His death and resurrection to be the end of the story of mankind’s redemption. It was accomplished so we could live life with a new hope, a new purpose, a new mission, a new calling. Look at Jesus’ final words in Matthew 28:18-20:

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

In my NIV translation, I count at least six accounts across the gospels after the resurrection where His followers were instructed to go, to take action. His calling was not to sit idly by or to keep this great news to themselves, but rather to spread the word that God has made a way for us to live in right relationship with Him, as accomplished through His death and resurrection. We’ve been restored and redeemed! That invitation extends to us 2,000 years later. Now it’s our turn to ensure others hear the story, know the joy, have an opportunity to embrace the hope, and live a new life.

My prayer is that this message resonates with you this Easter season, and as we strive to live out our vision at Salem—making disciples where we live, work, study, and play. By all means, look into the tomb and see it’s empty, but don’t then just sit and stare. Go and tell others of its historical occurrence and share with them the difference it’s made in your life. And as we do, we have His promise, His assurance, that wherever we go, He will be with us always. It’s a promise He can make and fulfill because He has conquered death and reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Happy Easter, Salem! HE IS RISEN!!! Go!

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