**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**“The Third Day”**

**Resurrection Sunday**

**April 20, 2025**

“If life is a cross-country journey,” writes J. I. Packer, “then the million-word-long Holy Bible is the large-scale map with everything in it, and the hundred-word Apostles Creed

. . . is the simplified road map, ignoring much but enabling you to see at a glance the main points of Christian belief” (The Apostles Creed). “Creed” means “belief,” and the main points of our belief are divided into three parts: “I believe in God the Father Almighty . . .” (He created us); “I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . .” (He redeemed us); “I believe in the Holy Spirit . . .” (He recreates us).

As Packer has also noted, the teaching about Christ “is central to the layout of the Creed, for it stands between the two shorter sections on the Father and the Spirit. And it is central to the faith of the Creed, for we could not know about the Trinity, or salvation, or resurrection and life everlasting, apart from Jesus Christ. It was Jesus Christ, in His redemption of all God’s people, who was the revealer of all these truths” (The Apostles Creed).

**Q.** But what if Jesus Christ was “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried” – and then *stayed* dead and buried? What if He never was raised on “the third day?” **A.** The bottom would drop out of Christianity, and every single line that follows “crucified, dead, and buried” would have to be eliminated from the Creed. What would that mean?

**First**, if Christ has not risen, then He never “ascended into heaven,” nor was He ever seated “at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.” If so, then He would not be governing all things for our good, as the New Testament assures us that He is (Cf. Acts 2:33ff; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20ff; Hebrews 1:2-3, 13; 10:12ff; 12:2). Nor would we have an advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1), interceding for us before the throne of grace (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), so that we might find “grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Nor would we have been given “another Helper” (John 14:16), the promised Holy Spirit (John 16:7), had Christ not ascended to heaven (Cf. Acts 2:33ff). Nor could we ever set our hearts “on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1).

**Second**,if Christ has not risen – and is not reigning– then He won’t be returning “to judge the living and the dead.” If so, then there’s no reason to live in light of “the blessed hope,” because there will be no “glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ . . .” (Titus 2:13). Nor will there be any vindication of God’s name or God’s people. All those who opposed us, because they opposed Christ, will never face the coming of a righteous Judge (2 Thess. 1:6-10), and the cries of the martyrs will never be answered: “*How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*” (Rev. 6:10). But even more important, without the return of Christ, whatever we experience in this sad world will be as good as it gets. There will be *no* better day coming, which is the promise of Jesus (Matt. 25:14-46; John 5:25-29) and Paul (Rom. 8:18-24) and Peter (2 Peter 3:10-13), and John (Rev. 20:11-21:4).

**Third**,if Christ has not risen, then “the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting” is all an illusion. No one has argued this point more forcefully than the Apostle Paul: “*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*” (1 Cor. 15:17). Why? Because without the resurrection, sin and death never would have been conquered. The resurrection demonstrates Christ’s victory over death, as Peter preached (Acts 2:24), and it proves Christ’s victory over sin, as Paul taught (Romans 4:25). Apart from this, our sins could never be forgiven, nor could we ever be declared righteous in His sight.

Furthermore, without the resurrection of Christ there would be no hope for our glorious resurrection. There would be no hope of a coming day when He will “*change our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body*” (Philippians 3:21; Cf. 1 John 3:2). Nor would there be any hope of ever dwelling with Christ – body and soul – for all eternity, which is “the life everlasting.” There would be no ceaseless praise, no unending joy, and no unbroken communion with our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We would have no Savior – and nothing in this life would ever be worthwhile except our self-indulgence: “*If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*” (1 Cor. 15:32).

But the glorious truth of Resurrection Sunday is that the tomb is empty: “*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Cor. 15:20). Today we celebrate this glorious truth and for good reason!

**A.** The resurrection testifies that Jesus is the Son -of-God-in-power: “. . . *Concerning His Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord* . . .” (Rom. 1:3-4). As commentators have noted, “the resurrection is the turning point in the existence of the Son of God. Before that He was the Son of God in weakness and lowliness. Through the resurrection He becomes the Son of God in power” (Cf. Stott, The Message of Romans). **Q.** What does this mean? **A.** His Sonship in power points to the authority He now possesses because of His exaltation to the right hand of God the Father. “Almost imperceptibly sonship begins to merge into lordship” (S. Lewis Johnson, Discovering Romans).

**B**. It demonstrates His victory over death: “*But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him*” (Acts 2:24). Can we be sure it happened? Yes, “The evidence is solid. The tomb was empty, and nobody could produce the body. For more than a month after, the disciples kept meeting Jesus alive, always unexpectedly, usually in groups (from two to five hundred). Hallucinations don’t happen that way” (Packer, The Apostles Creed).

**C.** It proves that His suffering and death was acceptable to God as full payment for sin: “*He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification*” (Rom. 4:25). Since the debt we owed has been paid, divine justice has been satisfied, so that all who come to faith in Him can now be justified, or declared righteous in His sight. The punishment for sin is over, confirmed by the resurrection!

**D.** It is the reason for our resurrection life. When we come to saving faith in Christ, we are united to Him in His death, burial, *and* resurrection. As a result, we have died with Him to the old life, and have been raised with Him to a new life: “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him*” (Ephesians 2:4-5). We can no longer live the lives we once lived, because we are no longer the people we once were – all because of our new, resurrection life.

**E.** It guarantees our future resurrection. His resurrection was the “first fruits” of a “resurrection harvest” yet to come (1 Cor. 15:23), assuring us that we will have new bodies: “*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 all be changed*” (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event in human history. It demonstrated His victory over sin and death. It confirmed His identity as the Son of God. It led on to His ascension and enthronement and His present heavenly reign. It guarantees our forgiveness of sin and our justification in God’s sight. It is the basis of our resurrection life here and now, and is the rock-solid guarantee of our future, glorious resurrection. Is that all good news? Yes! It’s the best news ever!

“Up from the grave he arose,

With a mighty triumph o’er his foes.

He arose a victor from the dark domain,

And he lives forever with his saints to reign.

He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!”

(Robert Lowry, 1874)