

# The Meaning of the Resurrection

by Kimball McKee sermon delivered 28 April, 1991

Sermon Delivered to  
CHRIST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

April 28, 1991

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Order of Worship

Call to Worship: Read Psalm 103:1-5

Scripture Readings: Job 19:23-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 11:25-26

Pastoral Prayer: Ephesians 1:18-34; 3:14-19

Sermon: The Meaning of the Resurrection

Benediction: Jude 24-25

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These last few weeks since Easter, Bill (Hughes) has been teaching you on the benefits of the New Covenant. We read as our Call to Worship this morning from Psalm 103—a Psalm of David—of some of the benefits of a relationship with God. Listing those, they are:

- He pardons all our iniquities—Who did that? Jesus!
- He heals all our diseases—Who heals diseases? Jesus!
- He redeems us from the pit—Who redeemed us? Jesus!
- He crowns us with lovingkindness and compassion. That's interesting. I thought we were to crown Him. This says He crowns us. What a God we serve!
- He satisfies us with good things.
- He renews our youth.

Renews our youth. Nicodemus asked Jesus “How can a man be born again?” Renewal of youth, as it is mentioned here in the Old Testament, sounds strangely like rebirth, like—if you will—resurrection. “Those who wait for the Lord,” the prophet Isaiah said, “will gain new strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not become weary.” How does this happen? By the power of Almighty God resurrecting us. Just as His Son, our Savior, was resurrected from death itself, He will resurrect us, give us renewed strength, spirit, mind, and bodies.

So one of the most important of God's benefits is the promise of the resurrection, the assurance of everlasting life, of life lived forever with Jesus, of dwelling in the house of the Lord.

What, therefore, is the Meaning of the Resurrection?

In the Greek, the word is ANASTASIS. From the word ANA, which is UP, and STASIS, which means to stand, be in position. ANASTASIS means to stand up, to recover moral and spiritual position, to be raised to life again.

Though the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important, it is not the only instance in Scripture where the dead came back to life:

- the prophet Elijah helped raise the widow of Zarephath's son
- Elijah's protege, the prophet Elisha, raised the son of the Shunamite woman from the dead, and
- Jonah, as a type of Christ, was “resurrected” from the belly of a fish after three days

Jesus Himself brought several people back to life during his earthly ministry:

- in Nain, Jesus touched the coffin of the widow's son, with the words “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And he did. The people cried out, “God has visited His people.”

- He resurrected Jairus' daughter. Remember the story. Jesus came to the assembled family and friends and said to them that she was sleep. What did they do? They laughed! Laughed at Jesus. But He just took her by the hand and said, "Child, arise." Luke says, "Her spirit returned and she arose immediately."
- And, finally, there was Lazarus. You remember this story as well. Mary and Mary had sent word to Jesus that their brother, Lazarus, was dying. Jesus deliberately tarried, saying to His disciples, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God..." Jesus let Lazarus die. He let Lazarus die so that the power of God might be manifested in Himself. It was upon His arrival at Lazarus' home in Bethany that He told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies..."

It is interesting to note that there were 3 recorded resurrections in the Old, and 3 resurrections in the New Testaments prior to that of Jesus Himself. Jesus' resurrection was the seventh—Seven is the biblical number for wholeness, completion, perfection.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ—combined with His crucifixion and ascension—all of which we regularly affirm in The Apostle's Creed—marks the completion of God's plan of salvation fulfilled through His Son, the Messiah, Jesus.

The resurrection—coming back from death to life—DISCREDITS all the skeptics who could not or would not see Jesus as anything more than a good teacher, moralist, and oddity who blasphemously claimed to be the Son of God.

Let us not forget that there were many devout Jews, in fact, the whole sect of the Sadducees, who did not believe in a life hereafter. I remember a Sunday School Class some years ago in another church. I was such a new Christian. I really didn't want to be there. Margaret taught the class, and I was embarrassed to reveal to her how little I knew of the things of the Kingdom of God. At any rate, Margaret was teaching about the resurrection, and this one fella quite matter-of-factly exclaimed, "I believe when your daid, you're daid!" This guy was a latter day Sadducee. Recall the story from Matthew 22 of the seven brothers who all had the same wife, each one having married her after his brother's death. The Sadducees asked Jesus, "In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" Jesus said, No one's. There will be no marriages in Heaven, implying that we belong not to each other but to Christ, His Bride, the Church. Jesus went on to tell them, My Father is "not the God of the dead but of the living."

There were—and are—also those who deliberately sought to perpetrate and perpetuate a lie. That is, that Jesus never rose from the dead, but His body was stolen so that it would appear that He had. This allegation, frankly, is not so easily refuted. After all, no one actually saw Jesus leave the tomb. His disciples only saw the EMPTY tomb. Nevertheless, that empty tomb is as much witness to the power of God as the cross itself.

As Christians and United Methodists, we believe in the empty tomb. We believe, as the old hymn proclaims, "Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes." We believe that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was both an historical and an eschatological event—Eschatological, by the way, is nothing more than a big Greek word meaning "pertaining to ultimate things."

So no one actually saw Jesus leave the tomb. How can we believe then He arose? Thomas didn't! Remember Thomas? Thomas whose name will be forever associated with doubt? Not until I actually see His hands and touch His side will I believe, so said Thomas. Jesus was obliging. And Thomas cried out, "My Lord and my God!" But what other evidence is there?

We are celebrating this day, actually 40 days, the time during which Jesus appeared to and taught His disciples "the things concerning the Kingdom of God." That time between His resurrection and ascension. It's recorded that during this time, Jesus appeared to more than 500 people.

And those who saw Him were never the same again. With the exception of Paul, nearly all were unlearned. Some of them might be considered braggards and cowards. Others were simply ordinary folks. But all were so convinced of the resurrection that they preached it, taught it, lived it to the point of DYING for their convictions! Even the most learned, erudite of men cannot explain why anyone would be willing to die in defense of a lie—unless it is the truth. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” His disciples, to a man, were willing to die in defense of this belief.

Whereas Christ’s death on the cross—His blood shed for all the sins of all mankind, past, present, and future—marks all of our sin debts “Paid In Full,” Christ’s resurrection from the dead marks the skeptical, fallacious, and scurrilous lies of the doubters “Discredited!” And so, like the Don Francisco song we can triumphantly proclaim, “He’s alive! He’s alive! He’s alive and I’m forgiven. Heaven’s gates are open wide. He’s alive.”

If this is not true, Paul says, “we are of all men most to be pitied.” Why? Paul continued, “if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God...” In short, we’re liars without hope. If Christ has not been raised, He too is a liar. We are still dead in our sins and our faith is worthless.

Then why do we Christians act as if there were no resurrection? Having stated to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies,” Jesus challenged her, “Do you believe this?” Do you believe this? And Martha blithely replied, “Oh, yes, Lord. I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God. Now I’ve got housework to do.” “Mary, the Teacher is here. Will you come in here and entertain Him while I finish cleaning?” Aren’t we a lot like this?

Last weekend, Margaret and the kids and I were on a Lay Witness Mission at a United Methodist Church in Ashland, Kentucky. This program over the years has been a great success—reaching out even to other denominations. Its purpose is to bring renewal to churches by enlivening the laity. I’ve been on perhaps a half-a-dozen of these missions over the last four years, and virtually every one has been to a dead or dying church.

This Ashland Church was no exception. This church had a glorious past. In the 50s it thrived. All the physical plant and equipment were still there. Beautiful sanctuary. Steinway piano. Enormous organ. Huge education wing—with half the classrooms empty! Last Sunday morning about 150 people attended the morning worship service. The average age of the membership is probably 60. What was once an enthusiastic, growing, and excited congregation was become a blue haired, balding social club. Without vision, the people perish.

These are superficial observations to be sure. But it goes much deeper. When I talked with our hostess, she told me her husband of 52 years was dead. When I led a group Saturday morning, another aging widow tearfully told me, “My husband’s been dead for five years. It’s nearly killed me.” Still others—either wistfully or matter-of-factly—spoke of dead spouses, dead parents, or dead children. Death pervades that church.

My friends, this is wrong, wrong, wrong. Either all those people died apart from Christ and indeed are forever spiritually dead and condemned to eternal damnation, or they’re alive and WITH THE LORD! I prefer to believe the latter. So why is everyone in that church so glum?

Even in the midst of his utter and abject destitution, Job could cry out, “I know that my redeemer lives [He lives!] and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed; yet from my flesh I will see God.”

The Apostle Paul simply said, “Thanks be to God Who gives us the victory through Christ Jesus our Lord.” VICTORY. Absolute triumph over sin and death for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. If this be so, then why do so many of us—myself included—think, speak, and act as if there never was a resurrection, and, therefore, no victory?

What I am suggesting is radical reappraisal of our attitude toward death and suffering—the language we use to describe it, the emotions we feel in response to it, and the very way we

think and pray about it. We need to permit the Holy Spirit to instruct us daily of who we are become of Who Christ is!

Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who lives but Christ Who lives in me..." To the Colossians, Paul wrote of this mystery: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Maxie Dunnam, former director of world outreach for the Upper Room, mentor of the Walk to Emmaus Movement, and now Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, in his book, *Alive in Christ*, tells us to write those words down and post them on the bathroom mirror, the refrigerator door, and the sun visor of your car. The secret is simply this—"I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The hope of glory!"

If you're alive in Christ today, my friends, you're dead to yourself. The person you were before accepting Jesus Christ is dead. You're a new creation. We proclaim in our ritual of adult baptism, "Crucified with Christ; buried with Christ; raised with Christ." And out of the water comes His new creation. Hallelujah! So why don't we talk this way? Are we embarrassed?

Many of us here are young. In contrast to the Ashland church, our median age is probably 30. Even I'm an old timer! Though many of us are young, our parents are not. We've already lost some. We're going to lose more. Our loved ones are going to die mortal deaths. We're all going to die. Though the song of several years ago exclaimed, "Fame. I'm going to live forever," we're simply NOT going to live forever in this flesh. But we who have a relationship with Jesus Christ are going to live forever. And those who have gone on—who are WITH THE LORD—are not dead. They're alive. So why don't we say so? Let's have the courage, if we know they died in Christ, to say they're WITH THE LORD!

I will go so far as to say, with Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, when you make the funeral arrangements, don't buy a plot, ask if you can rent!

Some years ago I determined I would never again be morose at the funeral of a saint. To my knowledge we've had only one death of a member of this church—Betty Gosney. Now those of you who remember Betty know how she loved the Lord. When she died I knew she was with the Lord. How could I be sad? I was joyous at her funeral. Actually, I should have been jealous. And so should you!

Heaven, my friends, is a far better place than earth. It makes Disney World look like Harlem. The home Jesus is preparing for us will make the White House appear as a slum dwelling. Not necessarily because its bigger, or more sumptuous, but just because Jesus is there! We're here as aliens and strangers. Our home and our hope is not here, it's in the presence of the Lord. Before He left us, He gave us very specific instructions: Go and make disciples. Tell people about Me; encourage them to accept Me; train them up in the way they should go; assemble yourselves together to worship Me. Know that I will not leave you comfortless. I have given you My Spirit, the Spirit of the Living God, which is power and mercy and love.

Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us. Indeed, a mansion. I have often wondered how awestruck I might be if I were to learn when I meet Him face-to-face that He had made that home just for me all by Himself.

You know, I suppose if we ever think about it, we all believe that Jesus is fulfilling His promise to build a home for us like some sort of general contractor. A sort of combination Ralph Drees, Kennedy and Job, and Henry Fisher all rolled into one. Perhaps we have the idea of Jesus in a hard hat, blue prints rolled under His arm, supervising the angels as they dig and nail and plaster. I doubt we see Jesus ever laying hand to hammer. How surprised we might be to learn that He—the master carpenter and builder—did it all just for us all by Himself. How awesome will it be as we meet Him, when He grasps our hands in His, to welcome us, to feel the scars of His death for us and the calluses of His work for us, calluses shaped by centuries of building homes for the faithful.

My friends, that's what grace is. That's what the resurrection means. That's Jesus Christ. His love for us. Who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

Kenneth Kimball McKee (1951-1992) is the late father of TNN Online editor J.K. McKee, and both Jane McKee and Maggie McKee-Huey. He held a B.A. in American History from Vanderbilt University, having also participated in its Ph.D program. Kim was a business owner in the Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky area, having been president of Elreco, a mining products corporation, and later McComas Technologies, Inc., a computer software developer. He was an evangelical Christian who was quite active in the affairs of his church and community.

Kim was a member of the United Methodist Church, being a frequent team leader in the Walk to Emmaus, having led the first men's Walk to Emmaus in Madras, India in 1991. He was also a part of the Lay Witness Mission, in addition to having been the leader of the singles Sunday school at Christ United Methodist in Florence, KY. Kim had always had a strong interest in the Jewish Roots of Christianity, believing it to provide great enrichment for Christians understanding the life and purpose of Jesus, leading a Passover seder presentation at Christ United Methodist in the late 1980s to early 1990s. Before his death in 1992, Kim had been approved for local pastoral ministry by the Methodist Church.

Kim McKee left behind a legacy of family and faith that his children have never forgotten, always remembering that their service to the Lord is to honor those who have gone before them.

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