

EASTER SUNDAY SERMON

A SERMON

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“He raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 1:20

OUR text this morning contains two parts; the first is that of *the resurrection*, and the second is that of *the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

I notice, first, *the resurrection of Jesus Christ*; and, in so doing, I notice, first, the resurrection itself, and then, secondly, the reasons that he was raised from the dead. First, I just notice the resurrection itself, for the sake of laying before you that wondrous change, or those wondrous changes, that the dear Savior underwent in his death and in his resurrection. He underwent changes in his death that no other ever did, ever can, or ever will; and he underwent a change in his resurrection that no other ever did, ever can, or ever will undergo; and yet all the saints will partake, in part, of both those changes. Look, for instance, in the first place, in order to throw a little light upon his resurrection, look at the death of Christ, look at the wondrous change he underwent, both naturally, and, shall I say, officially? The change he underwent naturally is like the change we must all undergo, namely, of a fivefold character. In the first place, there was a cessation of all the outward senses of the body, the seeing, the hearing, the smelling, the tasting, the feeling; these were all neutralized, these were all brought to an end. “He bowed His head and gave up the ghost.” Second, there was, which naturally followed, the separation from all that he had been associated with. This, to the disciples, was at the time a great mystery, that he should thus have been taken from them. Third, there was the separation of the soul from the body, so that the soul, for the first time, exists without the body; and fourth, there is the transition of the soul into eternity; and, fifth there are the new associations into which that soul enters in eternity. So far as I am now speaking, every Christian will undergo the same, only with that difference I shall presently have to notice. So that, after all, you that are Christians need not look with such horror and fear and trembling, at death, for it is merely the cessation of all your bodily powers. They will fall to sleep; and as the ancients called natural sleep an image of death, so it is a very good image of death; so that we experienced a kind of temporary death every night of our lives, except those nights in which we can't sleep. Now, it is a separation also from all we have been acquainted with here below, and entire separation. There is no more fellowship, no more communion. We know not what will become of our children after we are gone; we know not what will become of our relatives; we

know not whether riches or poverty, whether condemnation or salvation, except we see the grace of God in them before we go; we know not what will become of them; we are obliged to leave them all entirely in the hands of the Lord. No wonder, with these feelings, the Christian should feel concerned at the throne of grace for his children, and for those near and dear to him in the ties of nature. There is no Christian, when he looks forward to the entire separation from all that is seen but would rather see those he loves in possession of the grace of God, and in the veil of humble poverty in this life, than to see them exalted ever so highly, possessing all the corruptible things of this world so much prized by the world, but destitute of the grace of God. The Christian sometimes on this matter has solemn thoughts. Then, the third is, the soul exists without the body. This is a mystery we can't understand. It goes into a human form, as we see by revelations the Lord has made in different parts of his word, of departed spirits. And then, for there is the transition of the soul into the eternal world; and then, fifth there is an association there with the spirits of just men made perfect, and with God the Judge of all, and with Jesus the Mediator, and with an innumerable company of angels, such as we cannot explain. Now, look at this, then, Christian; for you to die is gain. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ underwent, in this matter of death, some changes that we cannot. In the first place, there were laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ, penally, the sins of unnumbered millions, the sins of a number that no man can number, that were given to him in vast eternity, and should, in process of time, be brought not only into natural, but also into spiritual existence, and should be brought to know him. Now, all their sins were set to his account; they were all laid upon him. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all." Now, what that load was, its magnitude, its weight, its terribleness, its dreadful character, I have no means, nor have I any similes I can use to illustrate. If we call these sins a collection of mountains, or call them a collection of clouds, or call them what we may, all our similes will fall short of that tremendous load under which an incarnate God came. If your own personal sins are sufficient to fetter and bind your soul through the countless ages of eternity, and to light up a hell of never-abating despair, what must have been the collective sins of the millions for whom Christ died! What must be the change, then, that he underwent when he arrived at the end of these sins, when he suffered, and suffered, until these mountains, by the majesty of his presence, were melted away, until the last mountain flowed down, until the last cloud passed off, until the last rugged rock was, as it were, annihilated! Who shall undertake to describe the wondrous change? Shall I call it the infinity of release, that the Savior must have felt when he arrived at the end of sin? And then, if you take into connection with that, the wrath of God, the sword of justice, the curse of the law, that fire which otherwise is unquenchable, that all this came upon the Lord Jesus Christ, when he arrived at the end, and there was no more sin, no more death, no more curse, the bitterness of death was passed; hell was, as far as the saints are concerned annihilated; death swallowed up in victory. What a sublime what a wondrous moment that must be when the incarnate God could reflect, and look into the age's past, and look into the ages future, and look to the law and all its penalties, and look to heaven, and look to eternity, and see everything clear, and then leave a testimony upon record that is confirmed in the salvation of every sinner, and will to eternity be confirmed! "It is finished." And he said with a loud voice, to denote that he did not die from natural exhaustion; that is to say, he laid down his life; for while his human nature died, he was God as well as man, and he laid down his life in the infinity of his majesty. What a wondrous change for him to undergo, from that immeasurable, that uncalculatable load that was laid upon him; the curse that was against him; for him to reach the end, and then to bow his head and give up the ghost! What a wondrous change was this! Let me say, poor, sin burdened sinner, sin-bitten sinner, sin tried sinner that feel your nature to be the very essence of depravity of all sorts, be assured of this, that if you are ever

released, it must be by what Jesus has done. He was released not until he had accomplished that unfathomable immersion into God's wrath to which he referred when he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straightened until it be accomplished." But he did accomplish it. He went into those mighty deeps; he overturned the mountains by the roots; he is risen triumphant from the dead and dies no more; death has no more dominion over him. Here is the change, then, that he underwent.

I like to bring things of this kind before you sometimes, because it has a tendency to endear the Savior, and to make you look with a little less terror at death, and makes you feel that he who has supported you in life can support you then; and, also, I feel a desire that you may be favored to give the Lord Jesus Christ the honor and glory of having taken away the sting of death; and not to look at death as though the sting was not taken away; and that you may give him the honor and glory of having bruised the serpent's head; of having conquered Satan, who had the power of death; and not to look at it as though Satan by death could drag your soul into hell; he can do no such thing. The Savior has destroyed him who had the power of death; and that you may not look at sin as though that could damn you, as though that could condemn you, as though that could appear at the bar of God against you. Sin may appear against you before the world, and appear against you in your own conscience; that may be but if you are thus one with Christ, brought into the knowledge of him, not one of those sins will ever be able to appear against you before God. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifies; yea, it is Christ that died." See the mysterious change then, that he underwent in his dying hour; partly setting forth the change that we undergo; and then his release from all the sin and curse that he endured was a change that none can enter into, that none can fully understand. But it is very endearing to stand and look on and see what Christ has done. The angel of the Lord ascended to heaven in the fire of the sacrifice, and Manoah and his wife looked on; and Christ ascended to heaven in the majesty of his own sacrificial perfection, and we stand and look on while he has done so wondrously as thus to finish transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness.

But I come to the resurrection. Now, in the resurrection, there is a restoration of all the natural powers. His holy and chaste eyes were open; his pure ears were again alive; all his senses, feelings, everything revived. Here is a change. The soul comes out of eternity into time; the soul comes into the body, takes its proper place in the body, reunited with the body; for there was a separation in Christ death of soul and body, though not a separation of divinity and body. There was no schism in his person; there was a separation of soul and body, but not a separation of divinity and body he was God as well as man, and therefore, no separation took place between divinity and the soul, or between Divinity in the body. "Into your hands I commit my spirit;" but that was his human spirit, or human soul not infinite and eternal deity. Well, then, Jesus Christ thus rises from the dead; the body is restored, the soul comes out of eternity, out of heaven, comes again to the earth, enters into the body, takes its place. The Savior rises and now, what shall I say? He had power to restrain himself, for reasons I could easily lay before you, or else, if he had not had power to restrain himself, he would, when he rose from the dead, have broken forth into that development of majesty and glory in the review of what he had done, the victory he had achieved; and as he saw in the light of what he had done millions of souls from age to age rising, rising, rising, rising down to the remotest ages, to the last so ordained to eternal life by virtue of what he had done; rise from the dead and rise from sin, rise from the law and rise from the curse, rise and rise from here, and ascend

to the height of Zion; enjoy the victory he has achieved; become witnesses of the truth that he has accomplished the warfare, established pardon, brought in double grace now, and glory hereafter. He rises from the dead, and is what I never was yet, and what you never were yet, perfectly satisfied with what he had done. He has done everything in such perfection, that he was perfectly satisfied with what he had done. Oh, what must have been the peace that he enjoyed; what must have been his happiness, his tranquility! Oh, how different the scene. Now he is among his disciples, no more being weary; if he wants to go now ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty miles, or any distance, he transports his sacred body from place to place without the slightest labor, without the slightest trouble, without the slightest fatigue. He could now transport himself from place to place, from one end of the earth to the other, had it been his will to do so. Hence, the disciples could not make out how it was he appeared amongst them. Ah, no longer the man of sorrows; he travels no longer as a mere man, no longer burdened, no more under grief. No, the deadly spear no more; the cross and nails no more; hell shakes at his name, and all the heavens adore. See how happy he must have been. And where is our happiness? Why, in this very truth, that Christ is thus raised from the dead; that he saw no corruption; that he saw the travail of his soul and was satisfied. See how happy he was with his disciples; how he breathed peace into them; and the commission he gave them to preach the glorious gospel in his name. Go in my name; and if you meet with devils, my name will overcome them; and I will give you a new language to speak with; and if you meet with serpents, abide by my truth, and you shall tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Fear not; lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. What a wondrous change! And let me here say a word or two upon the resurrection that awaits us. I have just now said your natural powers must cease; but when you rise from the dead, the eye that is now mortal will be immortal, penetrating, and a visual power that will see thousands of miles more easily than you can now see a hundred yards. The ear formed to drink in the eternal thunders of heaven; for the hallelujahs of heaven are as mighty thunders and as many waters; those thundering's that would confuse and confound us now, our ears will then be formed to drink them in in their eloquence, their harmony, their melody, their beauty, and their glory; and we formed to recognize the fragrance of the immortal Rose of Sharon; and shall I say our immortal palates, our palates shall be immortal, to live upon immortal fruit. And I believe, that when the body is thus raised from the dead, and the soul re-united to it, that there will be a burning glow, a holy, loving, pure, gladsome, burning glow throughout the person, soul, and body that the happiness of the soul and body will be beyond all description. And hence it is that you find that revelation we have of one in the Book of Revelation that John thought was the Lord, and who was one of the prophets. You will find they always appear as fiery kind of beings. The idea is, that there is a holiness, a righteousness, a purity, a love, and a glow; that the happiness must be, as says one, a fulness of joy, and pleasures forevermore. There is no beauty like the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ; in him is the perfection of beauty. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, has shined." See, then, the twofold change the Savior underwent; the one in his death, the other in his resurrection. Second, see the twofold change, or rather threefold change, we undergo; first, in being born of God, brought out of darkness into his marvelous light; second, when the body shall die; third, when the body shall be raised at the last great day. Ah, it is a glorious thing; we may read everything that is pleasant and delightful in the light of the perfection of Christ's mediation.

Now, to show to you that I am not making too much of these mysterious matters, angels were intensely interested. Peter says that the angels desire to look into these things. And I am almost presumptuous enough to tell you that I can explain how it is that the angel that you have in the

28th of Matthew, that his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow; and he rolled back the stone from the sepulcher, and in order that that which had been a hindrance to the disciples should not be a hindrance again, he himself sat upon the stone, while the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. Why was his countenance as lightning? Why, his pure, his noble, his great, his wonderous angelic mind was filled with an intensity of gladness by the resurrection of an incarnate God; by the achievement of an incarnate God; for it is by him that the angels see more of God than in any other way. His heart and mind were so gladdened, that it made his countenance like lightning, not the slightest sign or shadow of anything like gloom, mortality, or regret, but his countenance like lightning. And what was it that made Stephen's countenance as an angel of God? It was that intense gladness of heart, in realizing in his own soul the victory of an incarnate God, together with the prospect of being almost immediately in his wondrous presence, there to drink full draughts of bliss. And what, to go back farther into history, was it that made Moses' countenance so bright that the Israelites could not behold it for the glory? It was because he had enjoyed the presence of a covenant God; God had declared his name, and when God had declared his name, it filled the heart of Moses with such gladness it almost immortalized his body there and then. Oh, what a glorious religion is ours; the world sees it not; it is hidden now under our mortality; it is beclouded now by our faults and infirmities; it is in a manner degraded now by the universality of consent with which an ungodly world casts contempt upon the truth of God; but, never mind, the church is in the wilderness, she is now on her progress, she is not yet at the end of her journey; let her appear at the last, when she shall be clothed with the sun, and the sun only, free from clouds; when the moonlight of the everlasting gospel shall shine along the golden streets of heaven; and when she shall be clothed and crowned, and her diadem adorned with the twelve stars, she realizing in full perfection the fulfilment of prophetic and apostolic testimony; she will then say, Come, devil, come and see us now; come, world, come and see us now; come, Pharisee, come and see us now. Ah, my hearer, then they will say, Why, who would have thought that these hyper-Calvinists would have come to this? who would have thought that these free-grace people would have come to this? who would have thought that they were on their way to such a glorious state of things as this? No wonder that the Old Testament saints, when they saw, which they did see, this better country, refused to return.

Angels followed up the resurrection of Christ till they saw him in heaven, they were so interested. Matthew, as I have said, gives us one angel, his countenance as lightning, and, to denote his purity and happiness, his garment white as snow. Mark gives us one angel, whom he calls a young man; never old, you see, never grow old. Creatures, look how old they grow. Why, some of you I knew when you were little boys and girls, and you are quite old gentlemen and old ladies now almost positively. But not so there; no, my hearer. "A young man;" and yet this young man of whom Mark speaks was eight or nine thousand years old. What, say you, eight or nine thousand years old, and called a young man? Yes. That is what I call a good age for a young man; and the best of it is, he will remain young, never grow old, no; he is immortal; no failure there. Then Luke gives us two angels, still in shining garments; two men in shining garments to distinguish them, setting forth the delight they had. And John gives us two angels, still in white apparel and then when the dear Savior lifts up his hands on his disciples and blesses them, shall angels take no notice of this? After thus singing the sublime anthems of heaven at his birth; after tracing him through his life; after appearing to him in the garden of Gethsemane, and after attending with intense interest to his resurrection, for they saw everything that was there, shall they then stop? No, he took his disciples out as far as Bethany, lifted up his hands and blessed them; and a cloud received him out of their

sight. And “two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, you men of Galilee,” we love your Jesus Christ, we know what he has done, we know what he is, we know where he is going to; and we are favored to look into future ages, and commissioned to tell you that this same Jesus, he will be the same; God chose him, and God has been and always will be satisfied with his choice; he has done the work, with that work he has been, is, and will to eternity be satisfied, and with that work his people shall be satisfied; “this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven.” Thus, then, I think this very clearly confirms Peter’s words, that angels desire to look into these things. See, then, the mystery of the change he underwent at death; see the change he underwent in his resurrection; see what a path this opens unto us to go forth and to be assured that this God is our God, that he will never leave nor forsake us.

I hasten now just to notice the reasons why Christ was thus raised from the dead; and the reasons I assign must be only a sample of the reasons; and they all concern us, every one of us. The first reason why he was raised from the dead was because of the completeness of his atonement. You will find in the Hebrews, and I wish you to take particular notice of this, as well as another scripture that I have presently to quote, that he was brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Thus, you see that one reason, and we may call this the legal and rightful reason, why he was raised from the dead was because of the perfection of his atonement, brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Now you that are Christians can understand what I am going to say; and those of you that are not Christians cannot understand, not really so. The Lord Jesus Christ is called the surety of the New Testament, new covenant; and a surety is a person who is responsible for all that which is included in his suretyship responsibility. We are spoken of as being sold into bondage, sold under sin, and lawful captives to God’s law. There needed to be, therefore, a price to redeem us from this our state of sin, condemnation, death, lamentation, bitterness, mortality, and woe, there was required a price. Christ became responsible for the debt we owed; he became the Redeemer, the responsible person. And the surety can be set free only by his acting in accordance with the responsibility; he must pay the debt to the very last mite; for the language of inflexible justice is, “You shall not come out thence until you have paid the last mite.” Christ having paid the last mite, he, on the ground of having done so, rose from the dead. And hence we are brought up out of our state by nature and shall be raised up at the last great day, upon this very selfsame ground. “As for you, by the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water.” Thus, then, you will see, perhaps, without my quoting more scriptures, that Jesus Christ’s resurrection was founded in the perfection of his work; having paid the debt, having finished the work, having accomplished the warfare; for if I go not away thus, in a way that shall bring mercy and truth together, the Comforter will not come. That is one ground of his resurrection; if Christ had failed there he could not have risen from the dead.

The second ground of his resurrection was the decree of the most high God. He was ordained to this resurrection. Hence some of the words of the second Psalm are in the 13th of Acts applied to the Savior. “I will declare the decree; the Lord has said unto me, and you are my son, this day have I begotten you.” That, in the 18th of Acts is applied to the resurrection of Christ. Christ, therefore being begotten means that he was begotten from the dead, in a way that no other was, he was raised up from the dead as the resurrection of others. “Your dead men shall live; with my dead body shall they arise.” So, he was ordained; here was a fixed decree. Look at the faithfulness of our God in

abiding by his decree. He ordained Christ's resurrection, on the ground of the work that Christ should do. God was faithful. Here we can enjoy the decrees of God; here we can say with one, "He has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ." The third ground of his resurrection was, because his people, by virtue of what he had done, were entitled to this resurrection. It was God's order of things. I have quoted a scripture already to prove so. "Your dead men shall live." Well, then, if Christ be not risen, they cannot live; but Christ is risen, and therefore they shall live; and if Christ be not risen, your faith is vain; but Christ is risen, therefore your faith is not vain. If Christ be not risen, our preaching is vain; but Christ is risen, therefore preaching is not vain. If Christ be not risen, we are of all men most miserable; but Christ is risen, therefore we are of all men the most happy. If Christ be not risen, then they which are asleep in Christ are perished; but Christ is risen, therefore they which are asleep in him are not perished. So then, the people were entitled to this. Our resurrection is founded in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And your soul must be united to Christ in this, or else you cannot be saved. Hear the apostle: "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and shall believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead" receive him on the ground of the perfection of his work and according to eternal decree, "you shall be saved." If you are identified in your faith with his all-atoning death, and then go on to be identified in your faith with his triumphant resurrection, then you shall be saved. Again, the fourth reason was, because of what the Lord had for him. It would have been but very little avail to have raised his manhood from the dead, if there had been no inheritance for him; but in his resurrection, the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places. In his humiliation, the lines had fallen to him in a gloomy place in gloomy places; he walked a dark, a rough, a thorny path. But here, in his resurrection the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places, and he entered into the goodly heritage, fullness of joy, and pleasantness forevermore. This was the Savior's delight in vision before: "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices. For you will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption."

And then, fifty and lastly, another ground of his resurrection is or was, that he might gather in all the people that God had given him, raised them from the dead, present them before the eyes of his glory, and bring them into the same joy, the same inheritance, and the same blessedness into which he himself had entered, for they are to be heirs with him, and take courage, if you can, to hope in the Lord, and to look forward to something infinitely better than the best things of this world; not only better than the worst things of this world, but better than the best. Look at the change he underwent at the resurrection and bless God for hope you have of the resurrection from the dead. See the intense interest which angels showed in the progression of the Savior toward that glory that should by and by be brought about, and imitate those angels, if you can, say, Lord, if angels, who are only your servants and not your sons and daughters, as your people, saved sinners are, if they desire to look into these things, if it be their delight and their pleasure, if they felt honored in coming down into the sepulcher, if they felt honored in bearing testimony of Christ at the sepulcher, how much more may I, a saved sinner, interested in these things to the extent the highest archangel cannot be, how much more may I desire, above all things, to look into these things, to understand them, to be charmed with them, to be delighted with them, be carried away with them? For these are sweet moments friends when our souls make us like the chariots of Aminadab, and we can leave all that is behind which usually so encumbers us and enter a little into the charms of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now there are two more points to notice, which I must just glance at, and that is all. "He set him

at his own right hand;” that, in order, when poor sinners experience a mighty famine in the soul, and they are brought to self-despair, and begin to seek after heavenly sustenance, supply, and support, that Jesus might receive such; for he knows his brethren, though his brethren do not as yet know him. Joseph dealt rather roughly with his brethren; but it was to impress upon them more deeply the grace and glory of the dreams and visions that Joseph had had from God. And so, the Lord’s rough dealings with you are intended to impress upon your mind more deeply the grace and glory of the gospel. And so, when Joseph made himself known to them, and poured out such kindly words, with “Fear not, I will nourish you and your little ones;” well might their hearts be melted down at this unexpected favor. Just so now. Jesus is exalted thus, to disperse abroad, to give to the poor, and has said, “Him that comes unto me, I will in no way cast out.” He is exalted to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. And just as Daniel was exalted to the right hand of power; and was, according to the promise made in the 11th of Ezekiel to the Lord’s people, “Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come”, take that to mean the Babylon of this world; so, Jesus Christ is a sanctuary unto us in this world. Daniel was exalted to the right hand of power, and that turned things in favor of the Israelites where they were, in Babylon. You and I live in a Babylonish world; the word Babylon meaning “confusion”, a confusion of tongues, confusion of circumstances, and we often experience a confusion of mind. But Jesus Christ is exalted, and he is to be our sanctuary, our refuge; and in his light we are to read out the eternity of his kingdom, as we see was revealed to Daniel in Babylon. And just as Mordecai was the means of turning the tide of 127 provinces, that set in against the Israelites, Mordecai turned the tide against the enemies, and in favor of the feeble Jews; and Mordecai was thus next to Ahasuerus, accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed. Just so with Jesus Christ, he is at God’s right hand; he is great among all the spiritual Jews; he shall be accepted, with all their hearts and souls, of the multitude of his brethren; he is seeking our eternal wealth we shall not fail; and he is speaking peace to all his seed. And then look at something else, that just as the dear Savior is at Gods right hand, so shall the people be, they shall be at his right hand. “Where I am, there shall you be also.”

But lastly, “He has set him at his own right hand, in the heavenly places. I notice here, first, the contrast. These heavenly places, you will at once perceive, contrast with earthly. There were, of old, three earthly places into which the Lord brought his people; and the heavenly places contrast with those three earthly places; The first was the promised land; that was a land of plenty, of peace, and of freedom; and so, Christ dwells in heavenly places, in heavenly peace, in heavenly freedom; and so, by him we have heavenly plenty, and peace, and freedom. Second, there was the city of Jerusalem, and in that city set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David; and the magistrates in that city were to judge righteous judgment and were to maintain the rights and liberties of the Israelites; and if any magistrate was bribed, and sold away any part of the inheritance, right, or liberty of an Israelite, that was death. These thrones of David, I think, are a very good figure of gospel ministers. Every pulpit is a kind of throne in the city of God.