

We Serve a Living Savior. Matthew 28:1-28, 1 Corinthians 15:12-15

Disclaimer: Material for this message was adapted in part from sermons found on the Sermon Central website.

BUDDHA'S FINGERS

In 1981 there was a devastating flood in central China. During the flood an ancient pagoda collapsed at the Famen Buddhist Temple. A few years later, archaeologists were digging through the rubble when they made a startling discovery. Sealed in a miniature stone casket, they found what they believed to be part of one of their religion founder's fingers [the Buddha's finger]. They brought the finger to various countries to be exhibited.

In Taiwan, it was put on display at a mountain-top monastery. The finger was housed in a miniature golden pagoda as tens of thousands people came to pay homage to it. They burned incense and placed flowers all around the relic.

One visitor said, "I was born more than 2,500 years after the Buddha, but I feel moved and touched to have seen the finger." Some said they felt as though the Buddha was actually sitting in front of them.

How sad. People can sit in front of a piece of dismembered finger, or a tooth, any part of a body – any sacred relic – and think it was something special. Could the finger of Gautama Buddha help them? Could it reach out and touch them? Could it heal them? Could it raise them from the dead?

How would we react if someone claimed to have a preserved finger of Jesus?

- It would not be special. It would only mean that He is dead.
- In fact, if someone could find a finger of Jesus it would literally destroy Christianity.

The whole Christian faith rests on the single fact that there is no such body to be found. There is no finger, no hand, and no body — because Jesus rose from the dead. When the women arrived at Jesus' tomb on Sunday morning, the angel said, "*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has been raised, as He said.*" (Matt 28:5-6).

So we are here, especially today, to celebrate this fact: the tomb is empty. Christ has risen from the dead. This is not a memorial service for someone who lived 2000 years ago. We are here to worship Jesus, who is alive and is in our midst today. He is here with us today, and that makes all the difference.

But just for a moment, let us think the unthinkable:
What if there was no resurrection?
What if Christ died and has remained dead ever since?

If that is the case, then our Bible bluntly says that, "*our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.*"

If Christ died and remained dead. Then there would be no "Good News" for us to share with the world. He would be just one more, among many, misguided religious fools who duped a lot of people into foolishly believing in Him.

All the faith that people had placed in Jesus as the Messiah (the Christ) for these 2000 years would be useless.

All those people who have felt forgiven, who have felt they were living in a relationship with a personal loving God, would be self-deluded; they would have wasted countless amounts of time, energy, and money that could have been better used looking after their own personal needs.

All the prayers offered up to God in Jesus' name would be empty.

I mean, why would you want to believe anything about, or taught, by a dead man, who was utterly mistaken about His own identity?

Could this dead man help you today? Could He reach out and touch you, to comfort you or heal you?

Moreover think of all those people, who have dedicated their lives to sharing the teachings of this misguided and very dead man. Over 2,000 years of missionaries, pastors, evangelists, and Sunday School teachers telling the stories of Jesus and offering people hope for forgiveness and for their own return through death to eternal life by faith in Christ's resurrection from the dead. Who is more foolish, the fool or all the fools who believed Him?

Furthermore, our Bible bluntly says that if **Christ did not rise again from the dead**, then all those who claimed to have known Him, and who claimed to have seen Him alive after His execution, were liars. And **all of us who have since shared His teachings these 2,000 years have badly misrepresented God.**

- We would have no idea who God really is.
- We cannot even know if there is such a person as God, who wants to be our heavenly Father.
- Because **Jesus said to know Him was to know God, to see Him was to see God; that His life, His values, His teachings, all reflect who God really is.**

So, if Christ did not rise from the dead, then we know nothing about who God really is, or what God wants from us, or if there ever was a God at all.

If Christ did not rise from the dead, then atheists would be the most sane, the most-in-touch-with-reality people who ever lived. Because if Christ remained dead then there is absolutely no proof for the existence of God. Life is utterly meaningless, and our only highest purpose in life would be to live as personally happy a life as possible until our death, which would be the end of everything. It would make no difference how you lived, good or bad, saint or sinner, rich philanthropist or drunken bum, we would all be equal at death, dead and gone with nothing to remain, but a short lived memory in the minds of the survivors.

Our Bible also points out that if Christ did not rise from the dead, then there is no hope for anyone ever returning to life after death.

That means no one has ever come back to life, and no one ever will. Everyone will remain dead forever; separated from God forever. This is the basic definition of Hell.

Death would be the ultimate 'terminator' – if it was the final finish for Christ, then it is also the final end for everyone else who has ever lived, ever! If death conquered Jesus, it would mean death will conquer you also.

Once to live, and once to die, but no judgment; you just perish, you cease to exist. All that you have ever loved, cherished, produced, and accomplished will also die with you. Everything and everyone you have ever known, loved, and valued will eventually join you in the dust. From dust we all came and to dust we will all return, as our meaningless, purposeless, merely coincidental universe spins on in its completely uncharted course. End of story.

Then the words of that ancient pessimist Solomon would actually be the truest ever spoken:

Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes ... All things are wearisome; more than one can express; ...What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. Ecclesiastes 1:1-9

So if death is all there is in our future, since the darkness scares us, since we can't think of our never being again, do we just create such stories or theories to comfort ourselves?

- People want to believe that there is life after death.
- People want to believe there is reincarnation.
- People want to think that there is something of themselves that will continue to live on.

Are we are just bluffing ourselves to make ourselves feel good. If Christ did not rise, no one has ever come back from the other side to give us any hope for any future

except that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead!

"*Christ has been raised*" – Paul wrote this 7 times in this chapter alone.

The angel sitting by the empty tomb told the women, *Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead,*

Jesus Himself then met the disciples and they hugged Him; you can't hug a ghost, you can't wrap your arms around a memory. And for another forty nine days thereafter he walked, talked, and ate meals with over 500 people who then bore witness to His very much resurrected life after His very real death.

Christ's resurrection makes possible His promise of our own resurrection. He said He was going to prepare a place for us, and that He would come again to meet us and take us to His Father's house.

The Bible calls Him "*the first-born, the first fruits of all those who died.*" In other words, the rest of us will follow... the harvested crop will follow, there are more to come. Christ's resurrection guarantees His promise that all those who believe in Him will live again. This is the underpinning of the Christian faith. Everything we believe in today rests on this one idea

But the question today is ... do you believe this? That is the choice you must make. True, you haven't personally seen Jesus alive and didn't see Him rise again to life after His death. But history records that over 500 people did see Jesus alive after having seen Him die. And His followers dedicated their lives and even their martyr's deaths to sharing this Good News of God's forgiveness and eternal life offered through the payment made for our sins in the death of His Son, Jesus the Christ.

Since there is plenty of evidence that Christ did rise from the dead, proving that He was who He said He was: God's Son coming to seek us out and to save us The only foolish thing in this world is to think otherwise. WE SERVE A RISEN SAVIOUR

While pastor of a Presbyterian church in California in 1932, Rev. Alfred H. Ackley began witnessing a Jewish man who attended some of his evangelistic meetings. This young student kept saying, "*Why should I worship a dead Jew?*"

This bothered Ackley and it stayed on his mind. After waking early to prepare his Easter Sunday message, he was amazed to hear on the radio a famous liberal preacher in New York say, "*Good morning. It's Easter! You know, folks, it really doesn't make any difference to me if Christ be risen or not. As far as I am concerned, His body could be as dust in some Palestinian tomb. The main thing is, His truth goes marching on!*"

Ackley was so angry at this statement that he threw the radio across the room, yelling, *"It's a lie!"* During the Easter service that morning, Ackley preached with strength and urgency about the reality of Christ's Resurrection. But later that night, he continued to dwell on his Jewish friend's words and that sermon on the radio.

His wife told him it was time for him to do what he did best — write a song — and then he would feel better. In his study, Ackley re-read the Resurrection account from Mark's Gospel in the Bible, and soon the words began to pour from him. A few minutes later, he put music to the words, and answered the question, *"Why should I worship a dead Jew?"*

"I serve a risen Savior. He's in the world today. I know that He is living whatever men may say...
He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart."

Jesus Christ truly conquered death, and He said, "Because I live, you also will live"
That's our guarantee. John 14:19

That's why Christians do not worry about death. We are going to live on with Jesus in heaven; He has promised us that. Job, one of the oldest believers in the Bible said: *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God."* Job 19:25-26

And so, since the resurrection is true, we are also certain of two other things:

- We know that we have been forgiven and are now living in a personal relationship with God right now, with the assured hope eternal life to follow.
- And we know, that no matter what happens, no matter what changes take place in this world, Jesus our living Savior is with us to work all situations out for our good and God's glory.

We are here today to celebrate that Jesus Christ is alive. But there remains one very big condition to this wonderful future that you and everybody else has been offered.

You cannot change the truth. If Christ rose from the dead as promised, as witnessed by hundreds, shared and believed by millions... that's wonderful news, whether or not you believe it. But, whether or not you believe it WILL have a dramatic effect on your future life.

In perhaps the most loved verse in our Bible, the apostle John wrote this about Jesus..

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Did you hear that, Jesus came to offer you "**eternal life**," but you have to believe in Him! You have to accept His offered gift for yourself to receive it. And the verse goes on...

Those who believe in Him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Did you catch the qualification? **Only those who believe in Him will "NOT be condemned,"** while those who don't believe are "**condemned already.**"

If up to this point in life you have taken Jesus for granted, thought of Him merely as a good teacher, a historic figure to admire. If you have treated Easter only as a fun spring holiday to dress up and perhaps go to church ... then you remain among the **condemned already!** If I were you, I would not like to live in that condition one second longer than I need to.

Friends, believe this truth. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became a mortal man for the very purpose of dying – to pay the penalty of sin – death - for you and for me.

But, Christ is not a dead Savior!

He was dead! He died, but God the Father raised Him back to life again. Christ rose from the dead to prove to us, both God's forgiveness and our new life to live right now along with eternal life ever after

He is our LIVING Savior!

- Jesus' resurrection proves to us that He paid the price, your debt has been settled with God, you are forgiven.
- But you need to accept His gift. You need to personally put your trust in Jesus Christ.
- God is not going to force Himself on you.

Let's pray about this, and if you haven't asked the living Christ to be your savior... I would do that right now.