

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago IL

“CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!”

Romans 6:3-18

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Today is the climax of the Christian year. Our celebration connects us with the most significant turning point in history: the bodily resurrection of Jesus from death to glorified life.

But for many, Easter is about as meaningful as Ground Hog’s Day. With their actions (if not with their words) they say, “*Christ the Lord is risen today*”? That’s old news. “*Up from the grave he arose*”? Ancient history. “*He lives*”? Ho hum.

What about us? Easter can feel far removed from our daily experience. Compared to family needs, the challenges of friendship, workplace ups and downs, the daily grind, economic woes, political controversies and international unrest, Easter can appear to be irrelevant.

When I feel that way, it says a great deal about my limited perspective and unreliable feelings. It says nothing whatsoever about the resurrection itself.

For though it has been nearly 2,000 years since Jesus burst forth from the tomb, his resurrection is anything but beside the point. It makes all the difference.

☼ 1st, because of Easter death has been defeated. Death has not yet come to an end, but it has met its end in the Son of God!

☼ From the moment Adam and Eve chose the way of death, mortality knew no limits. It had free reign. Everyone died, and then they stayed dead.

Some of you who really know the Scriptures might ask, but *what about Enoch*? {Heb 5:11} **“By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away.”** And *what about Elijah*? {2 Ki 2:11, 12} **“A chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared... [he] went up to heaven in a whirlwind”** and was seen no more.

In those instances God *cheated* death. However, God did not *defeat* death as he did on Easter. Not only were *the Enoch and Elijah episodes* unprecedented, they will never be repeated. The direct relocation of those men to heaven without passing through death *did not establish a pattern*.

What, then, of the rapture? {1 Th 4:16-17} **“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven... and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”**

On the surface, this resembles Enoch’s and Elijah’s situation; but the substance is different. God took them to heaven. Heaven is an entirely spiritual place, in which only spirits can dwell. Enoch and Elijah are still there, living as spirits, waiting for the resurrection.

In contrast, the people who are raptured will **“meet the Lord in the air”** but they will not stay there.

Rather, they will descend to the earth as {Rev 21:2} **“the new Jerusalem, [comes] down out of heaven.”** Heaven and earth will be integrated, and all the redeemed will live there. Our resurrection bodies will be splendid, powerful – and quite physical. We will not be disembodied spirits.

The upshot is that Enoch and Elijah are the exceptions that prove the rule: from Genesis 3 forward, mortality knew no limits. It had free reign.

Not anymore! Not since the first Easter!

Death is no longer invincible or universal. There is one who has overcome the grave forever, {Ro 6:9} **“For... since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.”**

That’s great for Jesus, *but what about us?* {1 Co 15:19, NRSV} **“If for this life only we have hoped in Christ,”** then Jesus is just another Enoch or Elijah and **“we are of all people most to be pitied.”**

☆ But it is not necessary to hope in Christ only for this life. According to Holy Scripture, Jesus {Col. 1:18, NRSV} **“is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.”** He **“is the beginning,”** not the *ending*. He is neither the *only* nor the *last* born; he is **“the firstborn from the dead.”**

☆ The LORD promises that {Ro 6:5} **“if we have been united with [his Son] in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”**

The question is: *Have we been united with Jesus in a death like his?*

⚙ 2nd, because of Easter sin has been defeated. Sin has not yet come to an end, but it has met its end in the Son of God!

☠ From the moment Adam and Eve chose the way of sin, it reigned over humankind like an insidious plague. Our iniquity became increasingly pervasive and egregious. Even {Is 64:6} **“our righteous acts are like filthy rags”** for {Ps 14:3a} **“All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt.”**

Not anymore! Not since the first Easter! Sin is no longer inexorable or universal, for there is one who is untarnished by evil. Jesus {Heb 4:15} **“has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”**

That’s great for Jesus, *but what about us?* If we are doomed to be slaves to sin, then Jesus is just another good man and we have not {Ro 6:13} **“been brought from death to life.”**

☆ But we no longer have to {Ro 6:12} **“let sin reign in [our] mortal [bodies], [in obedience to] its evil desires.”** According to Holy Scripture, {Ro 6:10, 22} **“The death [Christ] died, he died to sin once for all,”** and **“the benefit [we] reap leads to holiness.”**

☆ The LORD states that if {Ro 6:2} **“we died to sin ... we [cannot] live in it any longer,”** for we {1 Co 6:11, NRSV} **“were washed... sanctified ... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”**

The question is: *Have we been washed, sanctified, and justified in the Lord Jesus Christ?*

⚙ 3rd, because of Easter our old selves have been defeated. The part of us that is not of God has not yet come to an end, but it has met its end in the Son of God!

☠ The moment Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they triggered a downward spiral of degradation. It is not merely that we *do* what we God does not intend us to *do*; it is that we *are* less than God intends us to *be*.

{Ge 1:27, 26, NRSV} **“God created humankind in his image,” “according to [his] likeness.”** But God is holy, and with every sin we resemble our Creator less than before. By our transgressions we distort and smudge and blur the divine image within.

Not anymore! Not since the first Easter!

Degradation is no longer inevitable or universal, for there is one in whom the image and likeness of God is pure and unmarred: {1 Co 15:45, 47, NRSV} **“Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam” (Jesus) “became a life-giving spirit. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.”**

That’s great for Jesus, *but what about us?* If newness of life stops with him, our species and every individual in it is a lost cause.

☆ But we do not have to perpetuate our own disintegration. According to Holy Scripture, {2 Co 5:17, NRSV} **“if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.”**

☆ The LORD God calls and equips us to be new creatures: {Eph 4:22-24, NRSV} **“put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and... be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and... clothe yourselves with the new self, created**

according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

The question is: *Have we become a new creation in Christ?*

★ All of this is beautifully summarized in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Romans 6:3-5 {NRSV} asks,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Christ Jesus has forever broken death’s grip on all who live in him. We who are joined with Jesus will share his eternal life. By his resurrection the Son of God has defeated death!

★ Romans 6:6-8 {NRSV} reminds us that **“We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”**

Christ Jesus has emancipated his people from slavery to sin. Although we still fail, we no longer have

to submit to our old master, sin. By his resurrection the Son of God has defeated sin!

★ And as we discover in Romans 6:17-18 (NRSV):

“Thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you have, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”

Not only has Christ Jesus freed his people from sin, he has freed us for goodness. Everyone who has life in him is a new person. By his resurrection the Son of God has defeated our old selves!

“Christ the Lord is risen today!” “Up from the grave he arose!” “He lives” – and that makes all the difference.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Thanks be to God for his indescribably good gift.