

Just this week I read a web-blog written by Dr. John Stackhouse, a professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver. In it, he talked about Christianity's central claim, namely that Jesus was (and is) the Christ, the Messiah, "the Lord and Saviour of the world."¹ This was Jesus' claim, it's the Bible's claim, and it's been the claim of the Christian Church for nearly 2000 years.

The question is, how do begin to wrap our mind around this claim? What evidence can we point to that backs up a claim of this magnitude? What is clear is that the earliest Christian argument, or evidence, for the belief that Jesus is God is the resurrection. *How do we know that Jesus is who He said He was? Jesus rose from the dead.*

Listen to the apostle Peter's first sermon from Acts 2:23-24, "**23** [Jesus] was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **24** 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.**"

Some people tend to think that Christianity, or the Bible, is about timeless, universal, spiritual truths, but I want to suggest that this way of thinking completely misses the mark. John Stackhouse writes, "[Christianity] is about *particular things that happened*, things that God did and said, that have affected human history once for all. And

the most important thing God has ever done is to become Jesus so we could see him and hear him more clearly and so that he could do for us what we cannot do for ourselves—namely, save us from evil, our own and others'."²

On Good Friday we remember the voluntary, sacrificial, substitutionary, death of Jesus--He willingly laid down His life, dying in our place. 1 John 2:2 says, "*He [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*" God's solution to the problem of sin, evil, and death was to take them into Himself, and then by dying, to put them to death.

But if Good Friday is about the death of Jesus, then Resurrection Sunday is about, well, resurrection--*it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Jesus*. The Christian claim has always been that God took on our humanity--and He was called Jesus--and this Jesus was and is the Lord and Saviour of the world. And the historical proof of this historical claim is quite simply the resurrection of Jesus Christ--everything else hangs on it.

In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul writes "*if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have [died believing] in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead*".

¹ John Stackhouse, Web-blog "Why Christianity is Believable: Part Two," October 9, 2009.

² Ibid.

Death was unable to hold Jesus, the grave was a temporary place and nothing more, on Resurrection Sunday Jesus rose from the dead--sin was vanquished and death defeated. Listen to the words of John Chrysostom, a 6th century Christian preacher,

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave”.³
Christ has risen--He has risen indeed!

Resurrection Sunday is about the Author of life rising from the dead and then offering us His resurrection life. 1 John 5:11-12 says, “*God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*”

I wonder--have you received this life from Jesus? He offers it to you freely--and while you can't earn it and don't have to pay Him back, following Jesus will cost you everything. Jim Elliot once wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” We live in a world in which almost anyone and anything can be bought, but the life that the Jesus offers is not for sale--it's a gift, it's already been paid in full, and it is for you.

We don't have to wait until our final breath to experience resurrection life--it begins the moment Jesus embraces us. This

morning we are going to hear from Christine, Markus, and Sofia, people from our congregation who are experiencing this life that Jesus offers.

Baptism/Testimony

The apostle John, one of Jesus' disciples, wrote the following as an introduction to a letter: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning [Jesus] the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.*⁴

What we've just heard from Christine/Markus and Sofia, without even realizing it, is evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ--evidence that holds up in any law court in our land: the evidence of the eye-witness. The eye-witness speaks of what they know--what they have seen, heard, and experienced.

We don't have to wait until our final breath to experience resurrection life--it begins the moment Jesus embraces us. When we put our faith in Jesus, when we invite Him to forgive our sin and lead our lives, immediate changes begin to take place.

Becoming a Christian doesn't mean our life will go from good to great, from complex to simple, or from painful to pain-free. In my

³ John Chrysostom, *Paschal Sermon*.

⁴ 1 John 1:1-2.

own experience, following Jesus has not meant a life free from difficulty. And while there is a qualitative difference between life with Jesus and life without Him, the major difference is the change in our orientation.

Where formerly we lived life as we saw fit, now we live for Him, we follow Him, we pattern our lives after Him. We enter into a life that's filled with meaning and purpose, a life that is going somewhere worthwhile, a life where joy is possible in the face of difficulty.

Where formerly we might have lived from a place of fear--not knowing what tomorrow holds, grasping tightly to whatever we can control--now, in Jesus, we have the basis for living with hope. One thing I know: *we are hopeless without hope*. But even in the darkest circumstances, the human heart holds on, daring to believe that there is something more, something better, something waiting for us.

I'm convinced that the hope that rises within the human heart is a whisper that points to Jesus, to His life, to His promise to be with us, to restore us, to save us, and to sustain us till the very end. Jesus came to restore hope, by working to restore all that has been broken in us and in our world. Jesus came to demonstrate the length and breadth, the height and the depth of God's love for us, and for His world.

While the death of Jesus is evidence of our human frailty, the resurrection of Jesus is evidence of life after death. Jesus died but three days later He broke loose from the grave, and when we put our faith in Him, we have assurance of what waits for us after we die--resurrection life, eternal life, life with God and all that is good.

Here in the West, we live in a world that is almost entirely based on performance. If you have good grades, good looks, or good connections you can find yourself skyrocketing to the top--but if you don't have the grades, the looks, or the connections most of us end up with a one way ticket to obscurity. Isn't this how the world works?

Here's the good news--God isn't interested in grades, looks, or connections. God is interested in you--He thinks about you all the time--but He isn't thinking about your performance. When we have been embraced by Jesus, we learn to rest in His performance.

Jesus is the perfect Son of God, He has been faithful and obedient in every regard--He has perfectly fulfilled all that God has required, so much so, that His performance more than covers our glaring missteps. When we rest in what Jesus has done for us, we can rest assured that we are accepted and loved by God.

In Jesus, we take hold of a life that is free from condemnation. If you were here on Friday, you heard Keith repeat the final phrase Jesus spoke from the cross: *It is finished!* The penalty for sin has been paid, it's enslaving power has been broken--you've been set free. In John 8:36, Jesus said, "*if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*"

This is what it means to enter into resurrection life. But I don't want to paint a false picture for us this morning--we need to remember that by definition, resurrection follows after death--until something dies, it cannot be raised to new life. Before Jesus invites us to live with Him, He invites us to die with Him.

Heinrich Heine once joked, “*Things are admirably arranged; God likes forgiving sins and I like committing them.*” But Jesus invites us to die to living for ourselves, so that we can be fully alive to life as God intended it. The good news is that there is unparalleled joy in living this way--the life Jesus offers is the life that satisfies. All that God gives is grace, that is, we do not deserve the mercy and favour that He gives. But this gracious resurrection life is an all consuming one--it asks for all that we are and have.

Listen to the words of Dietrich Boenhoffer,

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, [but] it is grace [undeserved, wondrous, gift] because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs [a person their] life, [but] it is grace because it gives [them] the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, [but] grace because it [declares the sinner “not guilty”]. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son...and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us.”⁵

We don’t have to wait until our final breath to experience resurrection life--it begins the moment Jesus embraces us. He invites us into a new life that begins now and will continue forever. May your life be shaped by His embrace--may you embrace the life that He offers. May the love of God the Father overflow in you. And may His resurrection power fill you, transform you, and sustain you in every season.

⁵ Dietrich Boenhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*.