

Easter Day
April 21, 2019

Pastor Lew Upchurch
Luke 24:1-12; 1 Cor. 15:19-26

“A True Treasure”

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

My friends, on this glorious day that we celebrate our Lord Jesus Christ, who broke the chains of sin and death by rising from the tomb, I have one question for you. **What is your true treasure?**

Think about that, and while you do I want to tell you about a young man that I know. In high school, he was an excellent student. His grades were really good. His SAT scores were almost perfect. He was a *National Merit Scholar*. People knew him as someone who had the academic gifts to excel. He knew that about himself as well. But the most important thing he knew about himself was that he belonged to Christ. As a sinner, saved by grace through faith in the crucified and resurrected Savior, this eternal truth for him was the best thing, above everything else. And it was just too good to keep to himself. So he decided to study theology. He graduated with honors and is now a minister in Christ's Church. Thanks be to God!

So, what is **your** true treasure? I'm not trying to trick you, or trying to make you feel guilty, or trying to make you wonder if you're as strong in your faith as that young man I just mentioned. I'm asking this question to remind you that all of us gathered here today on this Easter Sunday actually have the answer. But if we just kind of look at it from the surface, without digging a little deeper, the answer can be really hard for us to understand.

But this is nothing new. The Gospels record that it took the first Christian believers a while to fully understand the depth of just what Jesus accomplished. That's certainly the case for the women who were the first ones to the tomb that morning. As Luke records, they had spices in hand ready to prepare the crucified Jesus. But when they got to the tomb, he wasn't there. And this really confused these women. Where was he? Why was the stone rolled away? What was really going on here? But this shouldn't have been such a surprise to these women—the two angels reminded them of that. “Why do you seek the living among the dead” they said? “He's not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise” (Luke 24:5-7). I can just imagine the looks on their faces. “Oh that... right... now we remember.” But even as they told these things to the apostles, most of them either didn't believe it, or didn't fully understand the magnitude of a dead Jesus rising to life again.

And so it took a little while. But through the power of Holy Spirit, they got it. I mean think about this. After what seemed to be a complete disaster—their leader and teacher— crucified along with two common criminals on a hill outside of town called the skull, of all places— they would meet him again. Not as some kind of weird zombie-like creature. But as a real man with a transformed body. And once they understood and knew that he was their true treasure— God in the flesh— 100% true man and 100% God—they became witnesses of all they had seen and heard.

And this Christianity thing took off! It really took off. I mean, 250 years later the Roman Emperor, Constantine, would recognize Christ as his true treasure. Think about that. A Roman emperor joining the team of the resurrection... amazing!

But being a follower of the risen Christ has never been easy. Throughout the history of the Church, there has been tragedy and scandal. And it continues today...just like it does in all our lives. And here is where our lack of understanding of the magnitude of the resurrection begins to make us question the whole true treasure thing. Christians, just like non-Christians continue to sin. Yes, Christians might die with hope...but they still die. But as a wise pastor once wrote, “Christians and non-christians are like two people lying in adjacent hospital beds with similar symptoms. But one is dying and the other is recovering.”¹ I know this kind of talk might sound offensive in this day and age, but any distinctions we make between ourselves and our non-Christian friends are not based on the belief that we are superior because we’re not. **They’re based on Christ’s resurrection**, which as Paul reminds us, is “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep”(1Cor.15:20). Or to put it simply, if God raised Christ from the dead, then he really is the first of many others who will also be raised from the dead. But each has its own order. Christ first, then when he comes again, those who belong to him. Yes, “As in Adam all die, but in Christ shall all be made alive” (1Cor.15:22).

So, being connected with the risen Lord Jesus makes all the difference. United to him in baptism, he gives to us what only he can give. And it’s genuine hope, because it’s new life that’s eternal life! I’ve always loved the way Paul says it...”If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1Cor.15:19).

So, what *is* your true treasure? If you’re still struggling to answer this question, I want to help you. The truth is as sinners, we will all continue to struggle with giving the quick and confident answer of Jesus. We might be all in for him today. But what about tomorrow? If we’re honest, it’s hard to say. So please hear this and take it to heart. You will always find it difficult

¹ Dan Clifford, *Resurrection Victory*

making Jesus your true treasure. **But it's not up to you. It's his work, and it's his gift.** All that Jesus is and will always be is for you. His death; his resurrection; his coming again in glory—it's for you. Because through faith in him, **you are his treasure.**

You know, as I was leaving church on Good Friday, I received a text from a member of the congregation that made me smile, because it fits so perfectly with Easter. So I want to share it with you. The text said this:

Had a happy dad moment.

We were in a store that sold some really cute Jesus T shirts.

My wife and I were around the corner, but could hear our daughter talking...

She said to her friend "let me buy you one of those shirts for Easter." Her friend said, " I don't need Jesus." Our daughter said, "Yes you do."

She's right. We all need a risen Savior, my friends. Not to be a distant spirit man who we can turn into whoever we want. Not to be our buddy who we claim when we need a favor. **But one who claims us and gives us true and eternal hope.** Christ, the true treasure, has risen! Thanks be to God. Amen.