

Sermon for Sunday, April 22, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
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"WHO MOVED THE STONE?"

I Corinthians 15:1-26

Text: "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." I Corinthians 15:13, 14

The question that has always faced men and still faces man today is the ancient question of Job, "If a man die, shall he live again?" There have been various ways in which man has spoken of his immortality. For example, the pyramids of Egypt are in a sense a historical marker of immortality to Pharaohs who lived thousands of years ago. Or again, men like Alexander the Great have made marks on the course of human history that in a sense are immortal. Or once more, a man through the impact of his life and teachings can in a sense be spoken of as continuing to live in the lives of his disciples. Plato might be such a person. But none of these so-called marks of immortality deal directly with the continuation of the personhood of the individual and to that extent they beg the question. Each of us is still faced with that probing inner question, "Am I of worth. Is there in me anything of surpassing value that is worthy of preserving. Does my personhood really count. Or, am I simply a passing incident in the long line of history. Am I just a flame that burns for a moment and then is forever extinguished?"

Easter has to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that this is intimately and inseparably tied in with our question of our own immortality.

The first question with which I wish to deal this morning is the question of the resurrection of Jesus. I am going to call this confirmation. The empty tomb is one of the best established facts of ancient history. As much as anything can be proved by ancient history, this is perhaps better established than anything we can think of. Recently Dr. J. N. D. Anderson, a director of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London made a speech at Harvard University in which he looked at the evidence of the resurrection from the critical standpoint of a lawyer. He concluded from his objective study and his legal analysis of the historical evidence that one is driven to the conclusion of the resurrection.

If the fact of the resurrection is one of the best established facts of ancient history, why do so many today—including many liberal preachers—deny the resurrection? It is because resurrection is entirely out of accord with modern, scientific knowledge of physical death. Therefore, since it is outside what he has personally experienced, many modern men try to circumvent the evidence. He does this because he begins with the premise that it cannot happen. If you start with that premise, then you simply will not accept the evidence. Resurrection does not fit in with our experience of nature, so we look for some substitute explanation. Consequently, people try to say that the resurrection was a collective hallucination, or a psychological event, or a subjective event in which the disciples became aware that Jesus was alive in their thoughts and hearts.

Now, the disciples themselves never thought of resurrection this way. Our text for this morning tells us that Paul believed the resurrection to be so basic a fact that if it were not true, we who believe this are of all people most to be pitied. So modern man is left facing the fact of the empty tomb. Who moved the stone? Efforts to explain it away simply will not stand up in the face of the evidence. So the empty tomb leaves us with the fact of confirmation. Jesus was raised from the dead.

The second point I want to make has to do with the meaning of this resurrection for us and I want to call this information. The resurrection is not some peripheral part of the Christian faith. It lies at the center of Christianity on an equal with the cross. Jesus said, "because I live, you shall live also." The cross tells us that God died for our sins. That Jesus took our place on the cross and paid the penalty for our sins. It tells us that we are forgiven. But what is the point of saving us, of redeeming us from our sins, if death and the grave is to mark the end, to finish off the whole thing? So, the cross represents the greatness of God's love for us. The resurrection speaks to us of God's power over sin and death--that we are not only forgiven, but that we shall have eternal life. That is why we never use crucifixes. A crucifix is a cross with the figure of Jesus still on it. But we believe in the empty cross. The crucifix is only half of what God has done for us. The empty cross speaks to us not only of God's sacrifice for our sins, but it speaks to us also of the fact that Jesus is not on the cross any longer. It is an empty cross and an empty tomb--Jesus is risen and it speaks to us of our own resurrection. That is why St. Paul wrote that resurrection lies at the heart of the gospel. As he put it, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." That's plain enough, isn't it? Either Jesus arose from the dead and thereby assured our own immortality or everything we believe about him is of no value. You can believe in the virgin birth. You can believe in the teachings of Jesus. You can believe he was the Son of God. You can believe he died for your sins. But if he did not rise from the dead and thereby guarantee our own resurrection and immortality, it doesn't mean a thing. So to the confirmation of the empty tomb we must add the information of what it means. As Jesus put it, "If I live, you shall live also."

But let me make a third point. You can accept the confirmation of the empty tomb. You can believe the information of your own immortality. Yet, with the confirmation and the information it will do you no good whatsoever without what I am going to call transformation. Unless this confirmation and information is transforming in your heart and life, it will be of no value to you. Now, why would I say that? It is very simple. Unless the information of the head is transforming to the heart, it will not change your life. You see, it is not enough to be convinced by the confirmation and the information. God wants those two things to transform your lives.

See how it works. To whom did the risen Lord appear? Was it to Pilate who gave the order for his execution? Was it to the Sanhedrin who instigated his death? Was it to the soldiers who crucified him? Was it to the multitude who cried out for his blood? No, he showed himself only to those who were willing to be transformed--to those who were willing for their hearts and lives to be changed.

Will facts change people? No, not really. Many of us have the facts of the Christian faith this morning. But what Jesus wants from us is a changed life, a transformation.

Let me say to you as candidly as I know how: If you are content with who and what you are; if you have no desire to be different from what you are this morning, all the facts in the world will not change you. You see, Jesus did not bother to appear to those whose hearts were not open to him. It wouldn't have made any difference. And I suspect that if the resurrected Lord suddenly appeared right here in this sanctuary this morning, it wouldn't change the lives of many of us. No facts are not transforming by themselves. Look, for example, at the Jewish priests. They had the same information about the resurrection. Their response to the facts was very different, however, from the response of the disciples. As a matter of fact, they paid the guards to report

his disciples had stolen the body--they had moved the stone. And we can rest assured that if they could have produced the body of Jesus they would have certainly done so. Then and there they could have ended the entire Christian enterprise. So Easter confronts us with the confirmation of the resurrection of Jesus; it confronts us with the information of its significance for us. What is needed now is the transformation of our lives by surrender to the living Lord.

The story is told of an old choir master who was working with a group in a large sanctuary preparing for an Easter cantata. A beautiful young woman with an exquisite voice, the leading soprano of the choir, was engaged in singing the matchless anthem: "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth." She sang with great ability with every note mechanically perfect. Musically it was an outstanding performance. The old choir master was obviously disappointed, however, and he addressed the young woman in a troubled voice, "My child, do you truly know for yourself that your redeemer lives?" She was startled by the question and was obviously embarrassed as she mumbled some reply. The question had gone straight to her heart. That night when she got ready for bed she knelt down and asked the living Jesus to become her personal redeemer and to come into her life, to transform her. The next night at rehearsal again she sang, "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth." As her voice filled the sanctuary with sound it was as though the very presence of God filled the place. The old choir master came up with tears in his eyes, "My dear, I do not know what has happened to you, but tonight we all know that your Redeemer lives."

Yes, confirmation--the facts of the resurrection of Jesus. Information--for we know that we shall live, too. Transformation--a life that is changed and transformed--a life that is so beautiful that others know that your redeemer lives. How is it with you today? Does your saviour live?