

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The Resurrection of Our Lord (2021)

The Stone is Rolled Away

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“And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large.” (Mark 16:2–4, ESV)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *“He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”* (congregation response)

Life is filled with obstacles. It is extraordinary how life continuously runs up against obstacles which challenge us. Some of those impediments are nothing more than temporary bumps in the road, but others truly challenge us, slowing our progress until they are overcome by the talents God has given us. But then there are others challenges for which none of our talents are capable of overcoming. At such times we must rely on God to rescue us. Obstacles such as doubt, despair, and unbelief fall into this category. At such times, it is most comforting to know that God will come to our aid when we call on Him for help, and sometimes even when we don't. We see such times in the Old Testament.

From the earliest days of Creation man was faced with life's obstacles. Adam and Eve met such an obstacle when falling under Satan's spell. Stymied by sin, they ran into doubt and despair. Sin brought about an obstacle they had never experienced, fear of God. Moreover, their sin, their fear of God, became the curse of every man born since the fall of Adam and Eve. Sin became man's impediment to eternal life. But for this obstacle, the eternal life for which Adam and Eve were originally created would never have been interrupted with death. But God had a plan, a solution to overcome man's loss of eternal life. From the seed of the woman (Eve) would come a Savior whose life, death, and resurrection would overcome the sin of Adam and thereby open the door of eternal life for all who believed in Him.

As we fast forward through the history of God's people, we encounter all manner of saving interventions by God, saving His people from one disaster after the other; those which were self-made such as Adam's sin in the garden. Even when His people were ungrateful or filled with unbelief, God came to their rescue because of His promise to Adam and Eve, that from the woman's seed would come a Savior, rescuing man from the greatest obstacle he could ever face, his sin.

Sin is that one obstacle that man is unable to overcome by his cunning, his strength, or his will. Being incapable of saving himself from this curse, man must rely on God. He must rely on God's mercy and love; he must rely on God's promise if he is to be saved. But this reliance on God's gracious rescue is yet another great obstacle that man is unable to overcome. So what is man to do? Truth is, he can do nothing. God must come to his rescue, and thankfully for man, this is a rescue plan that God loves to engage in. God loves to rescue man by way of His grace.

St. Paul tell us, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8–9, ESV)* This way of God's grace is revealed to all men in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel

contains the blessed message that God declares all men righteous and saves them without the deeds of the Law or good works solely for the sake of His Holy Son, Jesus Christ. The very Savior He promised to Adam and Eve after their fall from grace and into sin. Thus, through hearing the Gospel of salvation man is brought to faith and is saved from the obstacle of sin. This is the truth of the Christian Church because it is the truth of Holy Scripture.

Furthermore, to bring this Gospel to men, God sent His only begotten Son into this world not only to become the messenger of this great saving plan of God, but to be the living genesis of this Gospel plan. His life, death, and resurrection is the Gospel message and all who believe the Gospel are rescued not only from the obstacle of sin, which stands between them and God, but from its consequence. Christ Jesus our Lord is the propitiation for our sin and the proclamation of this holy and blessed message of the Gospel opens men's hearts to the Holy Spirit who takes up residence therein and engenders faith in the heart of the unbeliever, leading them by His help to conquer that one great obstacle which separates them from God, sin.

However, to conquer this great obstacle of sin, this great obstacle to man's salvation, it required an exceedingly high and dear price to God. It required the life of God's dear Son, Jesus Christ. But how could this happen since Christ is God, the second person of the Trinity? With God, all things are possible. St. John tells us that, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."*** (John 1:1–3, *ESV*) Thus, Christ who is the Word, who was with and is God, brought all things into being at the Creation. St. John then tells us, ***"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** (John 1:14, *ESV*) Our Lord Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit, took on our flesh, and became man. All this to fulfill the plan of God for our salvation from before the foundation of the world.

Having come into the world, our Lord Jesus had one purpose, to save us from our sin, and I as said earlier, our salvation came at a high price, the death of Jesus. As our Lord went throughout the towns and cities of Judea and Galilee, He reminded His apostle on more than one occasion His death would be necessary, saying ***"The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day."*** ***And they were greatly distressed."*** (Matthew 17:22–23, *ESV*) Each time He told them, they failed to recognize His words as truth. But lo and behold, that day came when the authorities arrested Him, beat Him, and crucified Him on Calvary hill. There, hanging from the Altar of the Cross, our Lord Jesus gave His life to rescue you, me, and all mankind from our sins. His words became reality, God died on the Cross, and His apostles and all who followed Him sank into dismay, grief, and disbelief.

Oh, they said, we had such faith in the man. We were certain He would rescue us from our enslavement to Rome. We were certain He would restore Israel to its former beauty and power. But now, look, they have killed Him. His lifeless body now lays in a tomb only having been partially prepared for burial.

Our Lord's death occurred on the Passover, a day that also fell on the day of preparation for the Sabbath. The next day is the Sabbath and no Jew could work on that day. The followers of Christ had to wait three days before they could return to His tomb and complete the burial process. But had not Jesus said, ***"on the third day"*** He would rise after His death? Yes, He had. Not only had Jesus Himself referred to His time in the grave to be equal to Jonah's deliverance from the belly of the great fish, but King David, had prophesied of the resurrection of Christ in the sixteenth Psalm, ***"you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption."*** (Psalm

16:10, ESV). Jesus also had to rise before the fourth day, for the Jews believed that the soul of the departed hovered over the body until the fourth day, at which time the soul left and decomposition set in. Because the burial of Jesus had been done in haste, it was necessary for the women to complete the burial process, but due to the festival and the Sabbath, they had to wait until the third day.

Now, St. Mark tells us, ***“When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?””*** (Mark 16:1–3, ESV) Life had placed an obstacle in the women’s way. When Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried Jesus three days before, they had a great stone rolled into place sealing the tomb. A stone much too large for the women to move.

What now? How are we going to complete the burial process on our Lord? Listen, there is no thought of His resurrection. He died like any man; therefore, He must still be in the tomb. All that our Lord Jesus had said, all that He had taught regarding His death and resurrection went in one ear of his listeners and out the other. On more than one occasion, Jesus had said, ***“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*** (Matthew 11:15, ESV) But when it came to His death and resurrection, people who listened were unable to hear and thus unable to understand.

It is not so different today. The Word of the Gospel is still proclaimed among the people of the world, yet most do not listen. They are either too busy trying to eradicate the obstacles of life by their own strengths or they have succumbed to life’s challenges, saying simply, “que sera, sera,” whatever will be will be. Relying on their reason, their wisdom or lack thereof, far too many never come to know Jesus because the stone over their hearts is an impediment to their ears, and thus an impediment to the Holy Spirit. Without the ability to hear, they are deaf to the Gospel and their deafness blocks the Holy Spirit from entering their hearts, bringing the gift of faith that they may believe in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls.

But to the women’s great surprise and delight, when they arrived at the tomb, ***“looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large.”*** (Mark 16:4, ESV) St. Matthew tells us, ***“behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.”*** (Matthew 28:2, ESV) God had provided. God had removed the obstacle, the impediment between them and the tomb. But to their amazement when they enter the tomb they do not find Jesus. Instead they find a young man sitting on the right side. Undoubtedly not only are they surprised, but they are alarmed, even frightful. Who is this? Why is he here? Where is Jesus? These questions raced through their minds, but the young man says to them, ***“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”*** (Mark 16:6, ESV) The Lord has arisen. Alleluia! Be joyful. Seeing is believing, but Jesus reminds us, ***“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*** (John 20:29, ESV)

Yes, you and I who face life’s obstacles every day, face them unafraid because we know that our Lord Jesus has been resurrected from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. He has freed us from slavery to the Law, redeeming us from its curse, that we might receive adoption as God’s sons and daughters. Through the blessed waters of Baptism He has made us brothers and sisters to Him, children of God, robing us in His precious righteousness, and forgiving us all our sins. St. Paul tells us, ***“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”*** (Galatians 4:6–7, ESV)

God the Father has *Rolled the Stone of Death Away* and given us life eternal through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. God the Son has *Rolled the Stone of Death Away* by giving up His life in death on the Altar of the Cross that we might have life eternal. And God the Holy Spirit has *Rolled the Stone of Death Away*, by coming into our hearts that we might be given the gift of faith to believe this soul saving truth of the Gospel. This is the significance of this glorious day on which we celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Alleluia He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.