

(mis)Understanding Jesus Part 9

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[0 : 0 0] I would like us to turn for a few minutes this morning back to Matthew chapter 28.

As you know, in our morning services at the moment we are doing a study called, well it is with two titles, the main title is understanding Jesus, we want to understand more about our Savior and King, but the other title is misunderstanding Jesus. And we have that title, that second title, because we recognise the fact that in Jesus' time many people misunderstood him. Today it is the same. And even for us there can so easily be things about Jesus that we don't quite understand. We are getting towards the end of this series, so we will just probably have this week and next week where we will bring it to our clothes. I want us to turn together to Matthew 28 and read verses 5 and 6. The angel said to the woman, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen as he said, Come, see the place where he lay.

As some should you all are very familiar with, our world is full of logos, symbols and signs that identify places, companies, shops, food, drink, they are everywhere. You can find them on your car, on your clothes, in your cupboards. And these logos identify the product or company and often they will capture something, some key aspect of what that company or brand is all about. So I have got some examples for you here of some famous logos. First of all you have a shell, which is obviously a shell, which is very helpful in telling you, reminding you about the name of the company. John Deere has got a deer in it as you can see. So again that makes sense.

The other ones are a little more subtle but are actually very clever if you look at them closely. Amazon as you can see has got an arrow from the A to the Z and the idea behind that is to say that whatever you want from A to Z you can get it at Amazon. FedEx, if you can see it there, in between the E and the X, there's an arrow and FedEx is a delivery company and so it's the idea that arrow saying we're going to get the parcel to you, we'll take it to its destination.

Tour de France, the big cycling race, you can see that the R has got a E dot beside it to make it look like a bicycle. You see that there? Of course the big cycling race so it's very cool, capturing the fact that the Tour de France in the summer bright sunshine but also everybody is on their bikes. And then Toblerone, Toblerone I think is the coolest logo of all. Some of you may know this but if you look at the mountain, I don't know how easy it is for you to see on the screen.

[3 : 0 3] If you look at the mountain in the middle of the mountain there's a bear in the white bit that's cut out so you just see it in here. You see it there? There's a bear, a bear shape with one leg up and the reason it's a bear is because Toblerone originated in the city of Bern and bear is kind of the symbol of that city so that's a very cool logo. It's got like a, it points to the fact that that's where the chocolate has come from. Lots of cool logos. The great logo of Christianity of course is the cross. For centuries this has been what's identified the Christian church and that's a very appropriate logo. Christ's death is central to Christianity. He died as our substitute, a perfect sacrifice to make atonement for our sins. It's through his death on the cross that we're saved. We are here to preach Christ crucified and that's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that this is a matter of first importance that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scripture. So we all know that the cross is central. The death of Christ is a matter of first importance.

The cross is the great symbol of Christianity. But I'm going to say something maybe slightly controversial. I'm going to say that the cross is not necessarily the best logo for Christianity.

I think it's the second best logo for Christianity. The best logo would be an empty tomb.

Now that's a lot harder to draw which is perhaps why it's not used but I wish we could use it because the resurrection is what Christianity is all about. That's made so clear for us in the New Testament. The climax of the gospel narratives is not the cross on Friday. The climax is the resurrection on Sunday. That's why we don't meet on Fridays to worship. We meet on Sundays, the first day of the week, the day when Jesus rose. If you go into the book of Acts and read about the work that the early Christians did in spreading the gospel, they went from place to place and they spoke about the resurrection. You can see that in Acts 4, Acts 13, Acts 17, they went and preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now that doesn't mean that they didn't preach about the cross.

They did, of course they did, but they didn't stop at the cross. Their goal was to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. That's why when Paul talks about the matters of first importance in 1 Corinthians 15, he doesn't stop at the cross. He carries on to say, I deliver to you what's of first importance that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. In other words, the foundation of our faith is not just that Jesus died. The foundation of our faith and theology is that Jesus died, was buried and rose again. And that means that if our preaching, if our theology and if our understanding of Christianity is just focused on the cross, then we're in danger of misunderstanding Jesus. The resurrection is every bit important.

[7 : 13] It's arguable to say that it's maybe even more important than anything else. But the key question we have to ask is why? Why is the resurrection so important? It's pretty clear why the cross is so important. Jesus died to take our sins upon himself, to take the punishment for our sins in our place. But what is so important about the resurrection? That's what I want us to think about today and we're going to just look at three things together. The first thing we're going to say is that the resurrection is a confirmation. The resurrection is a definitive confirmation of the truth of the Christian gospel. Today, many people would say, you know, resurrections don't happen. And I remember there was a news conference at the beginning of the COVID pandemic where Nicola Sturgeon was getting a bit of a hard time from reporters for all the restrictions and everything else was happening. And she said, look, the one thing I can't do is raise people from the dead. I can't raise people from the dead. And she used that to say, look, this is what it's all about. People are dying and I can't raise them. And that mindset is nothing new. People said exactly the same in the New Testament. People don't rise from the dead.

You can see that in the passage that we read. I won't read it out, but Paul was addressing people who were saying, look, resurrections don't happen. The resurrection from the dead isn't going to happen. And Paul is addressing this. And you can see in these versions on the screen that he pushes people to the logical conclusion of what they're saying. He says, if there's no resurrection from the dead, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, then preaching the gospel and believing the gospel is in vain. And if Christ is not raised, then what we say about God is not true. And all of that is a way of telling us that the resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. In other words, if we remove it, everything falls apart.

And the point that Paul is making, or one of the points that Paul is making for us here, is that the resurrection is the confirmation that the gospel message actually is true.

And it proves three crucial things. It proves that Jesus is who he says he is. Jesus knew and he predicted that he was going to rise from the dead. He says that in several occasions, there's an example there in John 10. He says, no, I'm going to lay my life down that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down in my own accord. I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it up again. And yet although Jesus made these predictions that he would die and rise again, his disciples didn't understand them. Another example in Mark nine, he says, I'm going to be delivered to the hands of men. They'll kill me. But after three days, I will rise. But they did not understand the saying and they were afraid to ask him.

And one of the main reasons why the disciples struggled to understand this or to believe it was because of the magnitude of the claims that Jesus was making. People don't rise from the dead.

[10 : 55] It doesn't happen in day to day life. That was no different in the days of the Old Testament, of the New Testament as it is now. Jesus is making astonishing predictions. The resurrection proves that he was right. That's why the angel of the tomb can just throw in these three wonderful words. It says he's not risen. He's not here. He's risen just as he said. Everything that Jesus predicted is proved true by the resurrection. But it doesn't just confirm that Jesus is who he says he is. It also confirms that God is who he says he is. The resurrection proves the power and sovereignty of God. Jesus throughout his ministry makes a constant link between himself and God.

And he describes him as father saying in John 14 that I'm going to the Father. That's what he's going to return to. And in many ways, the resurrection claims are a test as to whether God actually is who he says he is. Can God defeat death? Can his son be raised? Can it actually happen? Paul touches on this in 1 Corinthians 15 where he says if the resurrection didn't happen, then we are misrepresenting God because we're testifying about God that he raised Christ from the dead. No resurrection instantly undermines all that the Bible says about God.

But because it happened, the resurrection is the emphatic proof that God alone is the true God.

So it confirms that Jesus is who he says he is. It confirms that God is who he says he is. It also confirms that Jesus's work on the cross was fully accomplished and accepted. As Jesus died on the cross, he said these great words, it is finished. That statement points to the completion and accomplishment of the task that Jesus had. That was the whole reason he had come into the world, the whole reason he had gone all the way to the cross to accomplish the task that had been given to him. But how do we know that he actually did finish it? How do we know that Jesus did accomplish his task? We know because of the resurrection. It proves to us that God accepted Christ's sacrifice, that the work of atonement has been completed. All of this means that the resurrection is a great confirmation. It confirms who God is, it confirms who Jesus is, it confirms all that Christ has done. In other words, this is the proof of the Christian message. Without it, everything else falls apart. That's why Paul can say that our faith is in vain. Our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain if Christ has not been raised. Our doctrine of God, our Christology, our doctrine of scripture, it all depends on the truth of the resurrection. In fact, they are proved by the truth of the resurrection. And this is so important because so many people will approach

Christianity and they'll say, I am not going to believe unless I have proof. Isn't that what everybody wants? Everybody thinks, well, maybe I should become a Christian, maybe I should believe the Bible, maybe this is right, but I need proof. Well, here it is. This is the proof. When you say, I need proof, God doesn't say, oh, no, no, no, I'm not going to give you proof. He's given you the greatest proof of all. This is it. How do you know that the God of the Bible is the true God? It's because of the resurrection. How do you know that Jesus is who he says he is? It's because of the resurrection. How do you know that the Bible is true? Because of the resurrection. And this is where, in so many ways, the resurrection pushes us off the fence when it comes to Christianity.

[15 : 33] It's an acid test for us all. Because if the resurrection is false, then the whole of scripture is undermined. Everything we're doing, everything I am pouring my life into is a waste of time.

But if the resurrection is true, then it confirms everything. And there's no middle ground.

We've got to decide which side of that fence we're on. The resurrection action is presented before you again. And it's like, well, okay, I don't believe that. In that case, everything's gone.

But if you do believe it, then it changes everything. And because of the truth of it, we trust, obey and follow God who raised his son, Jesus, from the dead. There is no middle ground. But you might be saying, well, how can I know?

How can I know? Well, when something astonishing happens, what do you need? You need eyewitnesses. That's true of any event in history. To prove it, you need evidence. You need eyewitnesses. The Bible gives you tons of them. That's why Paul in the first part of First Corinthians lists, he says, Jesus appeared to Peter, to John, to the apostles, to me. The Bible is an eyewitness testimony to the resurrection. And we might think to ourselves, well, you know, we wish we'd been there.

[17 : 22] Well, that would have been amazing. But thank God, we've got a copy of the eyewitness record in our hands and the pages of scripture. The resurrection makes or breaks Christianity.

And that makes perfect sense because the resurrection is central to everything that we're doing today and every week as a church. We are worshiping Jesus as we sing. We can't do that if he's not raised. We pray in Jesus' name through his intercession. We can't do that if he's not been raised. We read the Bible. We can't trust it if he's not been raised. We preach the gospel.

If he's not raised, there is no gospel. But the amazing thing is that Christ has been raised. That's why these words from the angels are so crucial. He's not here. He has risen as he said.

We are here today in the presence of the risen living Lord Jesus. The resurrection confirms that it's all true. But the resurrection is much, much more than simply a confirmation. The resurrection is also about restoration. As we said, the resurrection is the climax of the gospel narratives and the reason it's the climax is because this is what everything in God's plan has been directed towards. It's reminding us that the empty tomb in Matthew 28 is part of something much, much bigger.

Paul explains this for us in the passage that we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. In the verses 21 to 22, he makes a connection between Adam and Christ. Let me read it. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Now, when Adam is mentioned, it's telling us that Paul is talking about the big picture. He's sending us right back to the beginning of the Bible, back to the creation and back to the fall. And it's reminding us of the big question, what is the purpose of Scripture? What's it all about?

[19 : 57] And the answer to that question is that it's all about the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity. That's the problem that is being fixed. And that restoration is achieved by fixing the problem of sin. The relationship between God and humanity has been broken because of sin coming into our experience in Genesis chapter 3. That needs to be dealt with. That needs to be fixed.

Genesis 3 has to be undone. When Jesus died on the cross, he took his people's sins upon himself. He came under the wrath of God. He dealt with our sin. But Paul is reminding us here in these verses and in this passage that the key issue at stake is not simply sin. Now, that's I think an area where Christianity can be very easily misunderstood. It can be very easily thought that you know that we're a bit obsessed with people's sins. And sometimes Christians have given that impression that, you know, we're always banging on about sin and you need to come here, you need to sort out your sins. We need sins forgiven and we need to kind of correct everybody's sins. The big problem is sin. It's all about sin. It's easy to think that. And there's a sense in which it's right, but there's a sense in which it's not right because the key issue at stake is not simply sin.

The key issue that the Gospel is dealing with is death. When Paul talks about Adam, he doesn't say Adam brought in sin. He said Adam brought in death.

And that, that is what God is wanting to fix. When God warned Adam not to eat of the tree in Genesis, he said to them, do not do it for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. And when Adam ate, the problem was not just that he became a sinner. The problem was that by becoming a sinner, he became a dire. He became someone who was going to die. And it's reminding us that there is an unbreakable link between sin and death. And that's an absolutely crucial connection to maintain.

Sin equals death. Sin equals death. Sin equals death. Always. An unbreakable connection. That's made clear in many places, Romans 5:12 is an example. Just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin. So death spread to all because all sinned. Sin is the doorway to death.

[22 : 52] Or to use Paul's language in 1 Corinthians at the end, he speaks about the sting of death. Now, if you think about a sting, a sting is a means of getting you. You get stung by a wasp, stung by a metal. It's a means of getting you to be stung by a scorpion's tail or a bee's sting, whatever it may be. Sin stings us, but the real problem is that sin infects us with death.

It's a chain reaction. It's an inescapable connection. Now, we struggle to recognize this because we're so used to death, we must never forget that God did not create humanity to die.

He created humanity to live. And death is an enemy. Death is an unwanted intrusion into what God created. And that's why God's great goal is to deal with death.

And that will inevitably involve dealing with sin along the way. But the big target, the enemy, is death. As we read at the end of our reading, the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

So if Adam's fall sets off a chain reaction that leads to death, which it does, God's plan needs to do the opposite. It must set off a chain that leads to life.

[24 : 25] And that's exactly what God does through Jesus Christ. If the enemy is death, then the final victory point must be life. That's why Jesus hasn't come just to give forgiveness. He has come to give life. The battleground is the cross. That's where the weapon, the sting of death, sin is neutralized. That's where the battle is won. But the ultimate victory comes at the resurrection. That's the final victory point. And the key point is that just as Adam's sin set off a chain reaction that leads to death, so Christ's work on the cross sets off a chain reaction that leads to life, the opposite of death. In other words, the resurrection is not just the proof that Christ has conquered sin. The resurrection is the unstoppable consequence of Christ's victory on the cross. When we sin, it makes survival impossible.

Because sin puts us on a pathway to death. Jesus does the opposite. He defeats death. So the only outcome possible is resurrection life. The crucifixion and the resurrection are utterly bound together. And this is where I want you to see the incredible power that's seen in the resurrection. If you look at human history, if you look at everything that humanity has achieved, every power that we've harnessed, you think electricity, water, energy, nuclear energy, we've harnessed so much power and yet we cannot do anything to conquer the power of death.

But God can and He has. The crucifixion and the resurrection are utterly bound together because what Christ has achieved on the cross means that death is now powerless over Him.

It's lost its sting. It's lost its power. That makes the resurrection unstoppable. And that's the endpoint of what the cross has achieved. That's why Paul can say, we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over Him. That's why Paul can end the great chapter in 1 Corinthians saying, death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's big plan has been implemented. The big enemy has been defeated. Death has been crushed under the power of life. That's why the resurrection is not just some nice bonus to bring Jesus back to his father. The resurrection is the unstoppable consequence of what the cross achieved.

[27 : 36] Jesus came to bring life. The resurrection shows that that's exactly what He has done. The goal, as He says here in John 6, is eternal life. The resurrection shows that the damage caused by sin has been undone. Now this again is incredibly important. It's incredibly important for all of us. We will often talk about things being a matter of life or death. So getting into hospital on time is a matter of life and death. Having defibrillators in locations around the island is a matter of life and death. There's lots of things like that that are a matter of life and death, but really, really these things are only a matter of delayed death or imminent death.

It's only through the resurrection that we can actually think and talk about life or death. And this is why the resurrection is so incredible because it doesn't just prove the truth of what the Bible says. It doesn't just win an intellectual argument. That's not what it's trying to do.

The Bible is, the resurrection is proving to you that you can have hope in the face of death. Now we are all different. We are all so different. We've all got different views on so many different things and different backgrounds, different preferences. We're all so different. There's one massive thing that we all have in common. None of us want to die.

None of us want to die. This is what the Gospel is all about. And this is why Jesus came.

So that that fear and horror of death will be broken and replaced with the amazing hope of eternal life with him.

[29 : 57] And if you think that Christianity is about anything less than that, then you're not just misunderstanding Christianity. You're clueless about it. This is what it's all about. Hope for you, hope for your family, hope for your loved ones, hope in the face of death. God has done an incredible work of restoration. The enemy of death has been defeated by the resurrection life of our Lord Jesus.

So it's a confirmation. It's a restoration. But perhaps most amazing of all is that in terms of the resurrection, the Bible also talks about unification. Time has run away on me, which I'm most frustrated about. But I'll just be one more minute, hopefully, on this.

The resurrection is not just about what happened to Jesus. The resurrection is about what's going to happen to you. Paul speaks about that in Romans 6. If we've been united to him in a death like his, we will be united to him in a resurrection like his. See that that keyword, united. We're talking about a unification. And this is crucial if we're going to understand Jesus.

Some people think that Christianity is about getting something from Jesus. So you come to Jesus, you get forgiveness from him, you get healing, you get salvation, you get your ticket to heaven. That's not what Christianity is about. Some people think Christianity is about becoming like Jesus.

It's easy to think, you know, we need to be transformed, restored, made like him. That is not what Christianity is about. I'm not saying these things aren't included within Christianity, they are, but they are not fundamental to what Christianity is all about. Christianity is not about getting something from Jesus. Christianity is not about becoming like Jesus. Christianity is about being united to Jesus. That is what Christianity is all about. That's what lies at the heart of it. Yes, that involves getting things from him. And yes, that involves becoming more like him. But the key point is that Christianity is grounded on the glorious truth that we are united to him. And that's crucial because, you know, you can easily think, oh, well, I'll get something from Jesus, but then I'll hardly give my second thought. Yeah, I am a Christian, but, oh, well, I've got my ticket to heaven, it doesn't really affect my life.

[32 : 38] That's not Christianity. It's easy to think, well, I'll become like him, I'll become a better person. And then when I reach heaven, then, you know, I'll be what I need to be. That is not Christianity. Christianity is about being united to Jesus. And that means that there is never, ever a moment when we are not totally and utterly dependent on our connection to him. And that is why the resurrection is so crucial because if he didn't rise, neither will we. But because he has risen and because we are united to him, in him, we can have life. And I want you to see how amazing this is. I don't have to skip out these verses because I've run out of time, but I want to just summarize it all by saying this. Sin creates an inevitable path that leads to death. For an arrow there, it's pointing to death. Sin creates that inevitable path to death. Christ, on the other hand, creates an unstoppable path that leads to life. When Christ died on the cross and defeated sin,

Satan and death, then it was impossible to stop him powering up towards that path to life. It's like an unstoppable freight train leading to resurrection life. And the amazing thing is that if you put your trust in Jesus, then you are on board that train as well. If you put your faith in Jesus, you are united to him and to his resurrection power. And this is where I'm going to suggest that we could maybe have a slightly better logo for Christianity. The cross is brilliant, but I think that we could make it even better. We can have an arrow pointing down, representing Adam, but we also need an arrow pointing upwards, representing the resurrection. And I think we could maybe replace the cross on that side with the cross on that side, pointing us to the fact that through faith in Jesus, our sin has been dealt with, buried and washed away in Jesus. And now, united to him, we are powering forward in resurrection life through our union with him.

It means that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, your eternal life is unstoppable because you're united to Jesus. It's an amazing reminder that if you are a Christian or if you become one, which you can today, it means that when Jesus died on the cross, he took your sin out of your hand and he placed it on himself. But when Jesus rose again, he grabbed your hand and he took you with him and he'll never, ever let you go. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that Jesus is risen and we pray that every one of us would know the power of that resurrection. Today, this week, all the way to the day that we die and into eternity.

Amen. We're going to close singing from Psalm 16. The same Psalm version from Psalm 16 from verse 7.

[36 : 41] These are words that speak of the resurrection. They're one of the passages when we read in 1 Corinthians there, Paul said that Jesus died according to the Scriptures and that he rose according to the Scriptures. This is one of the Scriptures that the resurrection is according to.

It's pointing towards that great hope of resurrection life that Jesus gives us. So we'll stand and sing Psalm 16 from verse 7 to the end.