



Christ Declared by the Resurrection

Romans 1:3-4

Rev. Fred Greco

If you have been with us at Christ Church for some length of time of almost 12 years that I've been a pastor here, you may know two things about me. The first thing is that my general pattern is to preach consecutively through books of the Bible with only rare exceptions altering to take a different text. The second thing you may know about me is that I am a planner. So it should not surprise you, and you should not be caught off guard, that on this Easter Day, this Resurrection Sunday, we just happen to come to the text in Romans of Romans 1:3-4.

I'm not sure I could find a better text to preach on Easter than Romans 1:3-4. It tells us who the Lord Jesus Christ is and what he has done and what the importance is of the resurrection. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely without error, the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative, and the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient. We'll look this morning at verses 3-4, but for our text reading this morning we'll begin at verse 1 and go through verse 6.

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ..."

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. O Lord, we pray that you would use your Word this morning. We pray that by your Holy Spirit, who is the author of your Word, you would help us to understand your Word. We pray also, Lord, that you would help us to apply your Word to our lives, and we ask, O Lord, that by your Word you would change us, that it would take deep root in our hearts. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

Resurrection is at the heart of the Christian message. There is a reason why on Easter we celebrate. In our passage this morning, Paul speaks about the resurrection, but he also speaks about the resurrection in its connection to the gospel. As he opens this letter, Paul tells us the letter to the Romans is about the gospel. We saw this last week. We saw that the gospel is good news. We saw that the gospel comes from God, that it starts with him, and we saw we can rely on the gospel because it is grounded in God's promise to us, his people.

Now Paul is about to open up the gospel for us. He tells us the gospel is about God's Son. Do you notice that? At the very beginning of our text this morning he says the gospel is concerning his Son. This morning we are

going to see Paul lay out for us a picture of how the resurrection declares to us who Jesus is and what he has done. First, we will see that by the resurrection *Christ is declared to be man*, that Jesus Christ is fully human and this is critical for our redemption.

Secondly, we see *Christ declared to be God*. This is also true and no less crucial than the fact that Jesus is man. Jesus is God. Then thirdly, Paul will show us by the resurrection that *Christ is declared to be Lord*. This is crucial for you and me and how we live our lives. Christ declared to be man, Christ declared to be God, and Christ declared to be Lord. Let's begin, then, and open up what Paul has for us in verses 3-4.

Christ Declared to be Man

He begins saying that the gospel is "concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh." Now, you may find it interesting the way Paul begins this letter to the Romans. He could have started like the gospel writers. He could have begun this letter to the Romans talking about the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and how he came to earth or, instead, he could have perhaps started with a theological framework, an outline, as it were. Instead, he starts with the factual fulfillment of God's promise: the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The factual fulfillment of God's promise is found in the person and work of Jesus, and that is what distinguishes biblical Christianity from every other religion. You see, in other religions or philosophies there is no great tie to their founder or initial teacher. They can simply summarize the teachings independent of the teacher. No one even knows, for example, much about Buddha, yet Buddhism survives to this day. Islam teaches a great many things but does not depend on the character of Muhammad.

But with Christianity, without Jesus there is nothing. Jesus makes all the difference, and his resurrection shows us exactly who he is and what he has accomplished. So the first question that should come to our minds is, "So who is Jesus? Tell me a bit about him." Some say he was a good teacher. Others say he was a made-up ideal, an amalgamation of principles his followers put together, but the Bible teaches us that he is much more than that.

The Bible teaches us who Jesus is grounded in history. Paul says he was descended from David according to the flesh. He puts Jesus in time and space for us to know and to see. He is grounded in history. Jesus was born, Jesus lived, and Jesus died. In that sense, he is like you and me. Now there is much more to Jesus. We'll get to that in a few moments, but this is critical for us. Jesus is, in one sense, like us. He is fully human.

That's what Paul means when he says *according to the flesh*. He's describing Jesus according to the flesh. Now, *flesh* is a word Paul uses quite often in his books. More than 60 times he uses it in the New Testament. Sometimes he uses it to describe the frail or sinful part of being human, but often he uses it just to describe what it means to *be* human. That's how he's using it here in our text this morning. He's describing Jesus as being human like you and me. He is a man, but he's not just *any* man.

Paul describes Jesus in two parallel phrases. He says he was "descended from David according to the flesh," and then in a parallel phrase we'll look at in a few moments he says he was "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness." What does it mean when he says Jesus is descended from David according to the flesh? I want you to take a look at this word *was*. It is a verb that often is used to mean become or to be born or to take on.

That's why it is linked here with *was descended*. The word for *descended* is actually a noun. It says Jesus *was* of the seed of David. You may know that biblical phrase. I want you to think about *this*. What that implies is there was a time when Jesus was *not* of the seed of David. There was a time when Jesus was *not* man. Jesus took upon himself humanity. It was an addition that he was born of a woman. The idea here is he is taking on a nature, even that of being born, and he came from David.

This is how Paul picks up what he says earlier in chapter 1 about it being promised beforehand. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to David to send a branch from David who will establish God's kingdom. Jeremiah speaks of it this way in chapter 23: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'"

Jesus will be a king, but not just *any* king. He will be the one who will reign over God's kingdom. This is what God had promised to David in 2 Samuel 7: he would have a descendant who would reign over an eternal kingdom and it would be established to bless all people. Jesus is that one, Paul is telling us. He is the one who fulfills the promise to David. He is the one who fulfills the promised prophecy from Jeremiah. He is the one who fulfills the promised prophecy from Isaiah. Jesus is declared to be this One by the resurrection.

Now, we can see how Jesus is established as King, because the Bible declares the King will be one descended from David. The Bible also shows us that Jesus is descended from David on both sides of his parents, if you would. Mary is a descendant of David, but Joseph is also a descendant of David, Jesus' adoptive father, if you will. So Jesus has every right to the throne of David. We see this, but the question that might come is...*How can Jesus establish the kingdom of God and bless his people?*

The Bible tells us we need more than a king. We need more than someone to tell us what we should do, because the problem is that we are lost. The problem is that we die. The problem, in short, is sin. So how can the problem of sin be solved? What the resurrection does is it declares to us that Jesus is the sacrifice for sin that reconciles God to man, because sin requires judgment to be executed for it. God would not be righteous, he would not be just if he simply ignored the problem of sin.

We understand that even as people living in a sinful world. We see things happen in the world and say, "That's not right. That's unjust." It makes us angry, and what do we say? "Someone needs to fix that. That's not how

it's supposed to be." God cannot simply wink at sin or pass it over. He must punish sin, but the punishment for sin is more than you or I could bear, because sin is an infinite crime against an infinitely holy God. We are not able to satisfy that punishment. We cannot pay that penalty.

That's actually the whole idea behind hell, that hell is the eternal punishment of sin. That's why the fire is never quenched. That's why the worm is never stopped. One Puritan put it this way: if there were to be an occasion where a bird were to come to a seashore and every thousand years the bird were to take one pebble of sand and take it away, there would possibly be, no, there would *certainly* be an end to that. It would be longer than anything we could imagine, but there would be an end. There is no end to hell. It never ceases. *Infinite* is by definition without end.

That doesn't exactly help us, does it? This is not good news. What Paul does is he tells us that Jesus takes our place. That is why he became man according to the flesh. He didn't become less. He actually became more. He took on humanity as a way to solve the problem of sin. As a man, he could die for sin. It is the only way sin could be paid for in full and we could be justified. It is the only way God could be just and the justifier of the ungodly. Jesus took our sin upon himself.

Paul says later in Romans that the wages of sin are death. Jesus paid those wages. He died for the sin of those who trust in him. So on that Good Friday he took up his cross. He submitted himself to the shame, to the punishment. He stood as a criminal in our place. The only one who had never committed a crime, the only one who had never sinned. He bore the wrath of God for sin. The proof of his sacrifice was found in his death and burial. The proof of his victory is found in the resurrection.

Christ Declared to be God

We need never worry if all of our sin has been paid for, if there's not something left over, a "gotcha" moment. No, because Jesus has paid it all, and the testimony to that is the resurrection of Christ from the dead. But the story doesn't end with the death of Jesus. Some of you know one of my favorite short sermons is "Sunday's Comin'" by S.M. Lockridge. He talks about how Jesus was betrayed. It's Friday; the darkness comes. It's Friday; they beat my Lord. It's Friday; they hang him on the tree. But Sunday is coming. That's what the resurrection points us to.

The darkness of Friday cannot hold back the glory of Sunday. It's why Paul gives us this second parallel phrase to describe Jesus. He's not just descended from man. No, he is also declared to be the Son of God. I want you to notice the significant difference here. He *was* descended. That is, he took something on, but he was *declared* to be the Son of God. He was not *made* the Son of God. He has always been and always continues to be God. The resurrection simply declared him to be so.

It's not that there is something that is added to Jesus to make him divine. This idea of *declared* has at its oldest roots the idea of land use. What? It was used to describe how you bounded out one piece of land from another.

You marked it off. You declared it as yours. You probably do this in your own home or area. You mark off your property often with a fence or perhaps with some other kind of marker. You know where your ownership stops and where the other's begins.

The fence doesn't make you the owner of that property, does it? No. All it does is declare to everyone that that is your property. That's the idea Paul is getting at here. The resurrection does not make Jesus God but it declares him publically to *be* God. The resurrection shows us that Jesus is God, because man could not stand up under the punishment of sin. He could never satisfy divine justice. Remember the infinite punishment? If divine justice is satisfied, if sin is paid for, Jesus must be more than man.

Paul says this in his other parallel phrase: *according to the Spirit of holiness*. You see, Paul has set up here two very elaborate parallel statements, one about Jesus' humanity, one about his deity. Just as he was according to the flesh (human), he is according to the Spirit of holiness (divine). When we first see this, our thought is this is something to do with the Holy Spirit. After all, it's the Spirit of holiness. It's the Holy Spirit. The difficulty is that this phrase is only used here in all of the New Testament, and it's never used specifically about the Holy Spirit.

As a matter of fact, the resurrection is not specifically ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. It is typically described as the work of God the Father, like in Galatians 1:1 where Paul prays to God who raised Jesus from the dead. Or it may be even ascribed to Jesus when Jesus says, "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down, and I take it back up again."

So we don't have to immediately jump to the conclusion that just because the word *holy* is there and just because the word *spirit* is there this is referring to the third person of the Trinity. What, then, is Paul saying here? I think what he's saying is that it is better to understand this phrase as referring to Jesus' deity, that Jesus is holy, that his spirit is holy.

If you think about it, if we go back to the beginning of Jesus' life, to the beginning of the Gospels, you remember when Mary was with child the angel came to her and said, "The Holy One that is in you will save his people from their sins." You may remember when David was prophesying in the Psalms about Jesus the Messiah, the one who would not stand any corruption.

In Psalm 16:10 he says, "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption." That's a reference to the resurrection. I'm sure Paul has that in his mind when he says this. Actually, that verse formed a part of the core of the early preaching of the apostles. In Acts, chapter 2, it's the verse Peter cites as declaring that Jesus is God. He says Jesus is risen from the dead and that the Holy One could not see corruption.

It's what Paul preached in Acts, chapter 13, the same text from Psalm 16, the same connotation that Jesus is God, that he is risen from the dead. Paul puts it *this* way in that famous chapter on the resurrection, 1

Corinthians 15, in verse 45: "'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." He's using the same kind of language. This declaration of who Jesus is comes from his resurrection from the dead. From all of the dead, Jesus is the first to be resurrected.

You may say, "Well, Pastor, what about Lazarus? He was dead, and then he was alive again. What about the widow's son? What about these other people Jesus raised from the dead?" I think there's an important theological distinction to be made here. They were not resurrected; they were resuscitated. Lazarus came back from the dead, and then do you know what happened to him? He died, and then do you know what happened to him? He rotted. He was not resurrected.

Jesus is resurrected. He is glorious with a glorious resurrection body. He is the firstfruits of the resurrection. We can look to Jesus with great hope because that, Christian, *is* your hope. Your hope is not to live a bit longer. Your hope is not to have some additional happiness. Your hope is not to have more money or not to be sick. Your hope is to be like Jesus, and that's what God accomplishes through the resurrection.

The resurrection declares that Jesus is God, and what good news that is. God himself pays for our sin. We don't need to satisfy a harsh taskmaster. We don't need to pay to the last dime. No, God willingly takes *your* place and pays *your* debt. What could be better news today? Doesn't that give you great hope to know that God in Christ is *for* you?

Paul says a bit more about Christ's deity. There's another little modifying phrase he uses: *in power*. What does it mean that the resurrection declares that Jesus is the Son of God *in* power, or *with* power? Is he just referring to the deity of Christ? I don't think so, because he has already covered himself there. I think there's more. Again, think about the Christmas story.

How did Jesus come into the world as God? He came into the world as a baby, helpless, fragile even. He was indeed God, but his true authority was hidden. He was what we might call *incognito*. You know what that's like, don't you? People do that all the time. We see celebrities who don't want to be harassed. They go incognito. They think a hat and some sunglasses will accomplish that.

We may do it ourselves. If we don't want to be bothered in a certain place, we may dress a little differently to go incognito. Spies affect certain speech patterns and wear different clothing because they don't want to be noticed. They're incognito. None of that changes the fundamental principle of who those people are. The resurrection changes all of that for Jesus. No more is Jesus incognito.

The resurrection declares the power of God in the person and work of Jesus. It declares the great victory of Jesus, that there is nothing left to do, that Jesus has conquered death itself. It also declares who Jesus is for everyone to see, that Jesus is the Sovereign Lord, that he is more than the one who has paid our debt. He is also the one to whom all authority and power in heaven and on earth has been given.

This is exactly what Jesus is getting at in the Great Commission. Have you ever wondered why at the end of the Gospels is when Jesus says, "All power and authority has been given to me," as if Jesus didn't have power and authority before that? No, he certainly did, but after the resurrection no one has any excuse. Everyone knows, because the resurrection has declared who Jesus is and the power that is his. What a powerful statement by the resurrection.

We preach a Jesus who has all power, and in this scene the resurrection is more than just an event. It actually inaugurates or it starts the phase of the kingdom when Jesus is invested with power. It's not that he wasn't God before. He was. He always is. It's not that he didn't have divine power before. He did. He always has. But it is that now, as our Mediator, as our King, he has all power as shown by his defeat of death. Jesus is declared to be God by the resurrection.

Christ Declared to be Lord

The third thing we see is a public declaration of Jesus as Lord. This is the practical outworking of the resurrection. The resurrection is a public statement about what God has done. It cannot be denied. That is clear from the story from the Scriptures. The Jews tried to stop it. They bribed some Roman soldiers and said, "Tell people you fell asleep, and tell people his disciples came and took the body away." Never mind the fact they couldn't have rolled the stone away. Never mind the fact that there was a seal there. They still tried to deny it.

The Romans tried to help them, but the guards knew. Even though they were bribed to lie, they knew. It could not be denied. His disciples went and told this story. They left their very lives on the line to declare the public declaration of the resurrection. I read something very interesting this week from Chuck Colson who was formerly the head of Prison Fellowship. He basically said, "I know for certain the resurrection is true. Watergate proves it." What?

He said, "Because 12 men declared for decades that Jesus rose from the dead, and neither persecution nor death nor martyrdom could get them to move away from that declaration. In Watergate there were 12 of the most powerful men in all of America, and we couldn't keep one lie for a month." The public nature of the resurrection is such that it cannot be denied. Oh, people can speak against it. People can make up stories about it.

They come to elaborate theories that Jesus wasn't really dead; he just swooned, as if somehow you could be partly but not mostly dead after being on a cross for three hours, as if somehow then he could get away and then somehow later die again and no one know. The world will always try to deny the resurrection, but it cannot disprove the resurrection, because God intentionally made that the public declaration that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Think about the opening chapters of Acts. Think about how the resurrection was at the center of all of the preaching, planting the churches, discipling men, women, and children. Even Paul saw this. He came face-to-face with the risen Christ, and his whole life was changed. This declaration continues to this day. This declaration of the resurrection conquered the Roman Empire. It spread throughout the known world. It is found in places where it is dangerous to profess.

You may remember one Easter in Egypt there was a bombing of a Christian church because they dared declare "Christ is risen." That didn't stop the Egyptians from worshiping Jesus. That didn't stop the Egyptians the next year from declaring "Christ is risen." Governments cannot stop it. The government in China has tried over the years to stop the spread of Christianity, to declare that the resurrection is not true.

They have destroyed churches. They have imprisoned pastors. They have set the curriculum in educational institutions. All in vain, because today, by conservative estimates, there are between 80 and 90 (catch the word) *million* Christians in China. You cannot stop the declaration that Jesus is Lord. People all over the world hear that declaration. They hear it in Asia. They hear it in Africa. They hear it in South America. They even hear it in Europe.

I know in Europe they often have earplugs in to stop that gospel message, but you cannot stop it. Jesus is Lord. You can rely on that today because the Lord has made this a public declaration. Jesus, who is the promised heir of David, God himself by the Spirit of holiness, is Lord. Don't forget the last phrase of verse 4. Paul wraps up his description of Jesus as "Jesus Christ our Lord." *Jesus* is his name. *Christ* is his title, the Messiah, the Anointed One, but he is Lord.

This declaration is powerful, because in Paul's day this was a subversive message. The only one you were supposed to say was lord was Caesar. By this declaration, Christians marked themselves out as subversives. If you've ever wondered why so many Christians were put to death in the days following the writing of the New Testament, this is it. They were put to death solely because they refused to stop saying "Jesus is Lord." That was a death sentence in Rome. Paul would not have stopped. Paul declared that Jesus is Lord.

Finally, then, what does this mean for you and me? What is the important implication that Jesus is Lord? It means Jesus reigns today. It means that in his reign he has completed the work of redemption, and you don't need to do anything more. It has all been done. Theologian John Stott puts it this way: "The title 'Lord' is a symbol of Christ's victory over the forces of evil.

If Jesus has been exalted over all the principalities and powers of evil, as indeed he has, this is the reason why he has been called Lord. If Jesus has been proclaimed Lord, as he has, it is because these powers are under his feet. He has conquered them on the cross, and therefore our salvation—that is to say, our rescue from sin, Satan, fear, and death—is due to that victory."

Jesus is exalted because he is Lord. God has highly exalted him. Paul puts it this way in a famous passage in Philippians, chapter 2: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

What this means, beloved, is if you trust Jesus Christ by faith this morning, if you have said, "I can't handle my sin. I'm naked before a holy God. How can I get rid of this guilt?" and if your only hope and trust is in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he has taken your sin from you and given you his righteousness in that great transaction on the cross, it means Jesus is *your* Lord.

The resurrection is more than a declaration. It is also a call to Christians. Jesus is Lord. Will you serve him today? Jesus is Lord. Will you acknowledge him before others? Jesus is Lord, and if he is Lord it changes the way you think. You now need to think like Jesus. "Well, how can I do that, Pastor? How do I know what Jesus would want me to think?" Well, I'm glad you've asked that. Jesus has told you in his Book.

If Jesus is your Lord, if you confess the resurrection of Jesus, then you must be a person of the Book. You must study the Scriptures. You must find God there. You must find your life there. You must live your life according to the commands of Jesus, because how can you say "Jesus is Lord" and then not do what he says? You see, the resurrection has great implications, cosmic implications for all of the universe, but it also does for *you* in the quiet of your home.

It means you must serve Jesus, because God has declared him to be who he is: the divine sacrifice for sin, the one who has worked atonement, God himself and Lord. The resurrection changes you in every way. The resurrection is the most momentous event in all of human history. It declares that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise, that he is God himself who has won the victory, and that he is the Lord and Savior of his people. What a blessed thought. Praise Jesus with me. He is risen.