

## 1 Corinthians 15:3-7;19-28; 51-58

### The Symbols of Christ The Grave

**Introduction:** Good Morning and Happy Easter! Today people all around the world are remembering and celebrating the greatest event in human history- the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! All human discovery and achievement, all scientific breakthrough and advance pale in comparison to this most glorious event- which was essentially, the abolition of death, and meaninglessness and the ushering in of true Hope for the world.

Typically on this day...

I could tell you that Jesus didn't swoon on the cross, but actually, truly, died. And his death was seen to by professional executioners.

I could tell you he was buried in a well known location and yet three days later the tomb was empty.

I could tell you that women were the first to see him risen from the dead (Which brought no credit to the claim in those days, because of the low role of women in that society). Why mention the women at all? Because it's actually how it went down.

I could tell you that 500 people saw the Risen Jesus at one time.

I could tell you that Jesus ate and drank, talked and walked with his closest friends and followers for forty days after his resurrection. His appearance was not just a one time hallucinated experience.

I could tell you that Jesus' own family members who were skeptical of him - accepted him as Messiah and God after witnessing his resurrection.

I could tell you that each of the Apostles (excluding John) died gruesome deaths for their claim that Jesus was Messiah and Lord.

I could tell you that people back then were not more gullible about these things than we are. No one in the 1st century (besides the Jews) believed in resurrection or wanted it for that matter - The greeks had a very low view of the body and the after life.. and yet the claim that Jesus rose from the dead and was King over all, changed the world.

These facts concerning Jesus' resurrection are of huge importance, but they aren't told us in scripture as cold facts from a text book waiting to be dusted off once a year around this time. **No, the Christian life is to be one continual celebration and observance of the Resurrection of**

**Jesus Christ from the dead! The resurrection of Jesus is not just an event in history, it is a life to be lived. Christians are called and invited by God to practice resurrection.**

"The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you're now invited to belong to it." - N.T. Wright

### **What does it mean to practice Resurrection?**

To accept Jesus victory over death as a living reality. This living is both calculated and care free.

**Calculated** - *“Every act of love, every deed done in Christ and by the Spirit, every work of true creativity - doing justice, making peace, healing families, resisting temptation, seeking and winning true freedom - is an earthly event in a long history of things that implement Jesus’ own Resurrection and anticipate the final new creation and act as signposts of hope, pointing back to the first and on to the second...”* - N T Wright

**Care Free** - If the resurrection is true, then this is not my only life, nor is it my best life, but the best is yet to come. Not only is the best to come but it is “imperishable, undefiled, unfading and reserved in heaven for us, protected by God!” - 1 Peter 1:4-5

So love all people liberally. Show kindness to all. Forgive freely. Think the best of people. Loosen your control and worry. Give more away. Take yourself less seriously. Spend more time with people, and investing in people and less time on projects. Bless the people who hate and curse you. Read another story to your kids, spend more time playing with them. Throw a great party.. plant a garden. Celebrate life liberally, and freely -

Because Christ is risen from the dead, having trampled death by death and and upon those in the tombs Bestowing life!

Leading up to Easter, we’ve been trying to find ways in our everyday rhythms that we can observe and practice these symbols of Christ - the water, the meal, the cross, and the grave.

I believe that God wants to speak to us in the ordinary, everyday imagery and symbols all around us, because the ordinary is where real life is

happening. He wants to use his creation, and our daily rhythms in it to bring about spiritual formation.

*“The kind of Spiritual life and disciplines needed to sustain the Christian life are quiet, repetitive and ordinary” - Tish Harrison Warren, Liturgy of the Ordinary*

So let's talk about the grave - and how we might make the grave a daily liturgy.

## **1. The Grave.**

1. We're human - so death or the grave is an image or experience that isn't far from each of us. Whether you've lost a loved one or had your own near death experience - We know death. We all know deep down that death is near and could potentially strike at any moment. Some of us try to ignore it, others of us are constantly thinking of it, and paralyzed by it.
2. *“The current death-rate is awesome. Three people die every second, 180 every minute, nearly 11,000 every hour, about 260,000 everyday, 95,000,000 every year. Death comes to young and old, rich and poor, good and bad, educated and ignorant, king and commoner... The dynamic young businessman, the glamorous actress, the great athlete, the brilliant scientist, the television personality, the powerful politician – none can resist the moment when death will lay it's hand upon them and bring all their fame and achievements to nothing... Death is no respecter of time or place; it has neither season nor parish. It can strike at any moment of day or night, on land, on the sea or in the air. It comes to the hospital bed, the busy road, the comfortable armchair, the sports field and the office; there is not a single spot of the face of the planet where it is not able to strike”. - John Blanchard, Whatever happened to Hell*
3. The Greek philosopher Epicurus said, *“It is possible to provide security against other ills, but as far as death is concerned, we men live in a city without walls”*. It's like a scene from the Coen brothers -No country for old men.. death comes from nowhere and is going nowhere.. it is just haphazardly taking life...
4. In Biblical imagery the grave is of course the ground, or a tomb - but behind the image is deep meaning - The grave is the very antithesis of the enjoyment of life. It is the absence of

companionship, the love between man and woman, the sounds of joy and laughter, enjoying the fruits of one's labor...

5. Death and the grave are also seen as a tyrannical monarch over the kingdom of the dead. A trap that ensnared its prey with cords that could not be undone -(2 Sam 22:6; Psalm 18:5) - Mot - the Canaanite god of death was thought to have a giant mouth that would swallow people up. Death is pictured as prison bars that were impenetrable (Job 17:16)
6. Death is a tyrant and a thief - stripping every person bare, destroying everything good in God's creation.

## 2. Hope of Resurrection

1. But at the same time the Biblical writers knew of God's promise to restore all things and redeem his world - the understanding was that at the end of time (The Great Day of the LORD) God would set everything right, and he would raise up or resurrect the righteous to forever experience his renewed creation. While the unrighteous would be resurrected to be judged and banished from God's good world and kingdom.. righteousness rewarded and evil finally named and judged.
  1. Ezekiel vision of the valley of dry bones pictures this resurrection at the end of time - Ezekiel 37.. Also, Isaiah 25 celebrates God's final victory over death - **"And in this mountain The Lord of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people. He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken." - Isaiah 25:6-8**
    1. **Probably the most obvious OT reference to resurrection is Daniel 12:2-3 - "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever."**
    2. In scripture therefore Death is often spoken of in terms of sleep - "And David slept with his father's" (1 kings 2:10) - Because in

biblical understanding death, though still an enemy, and a tragic interruption of earthly life, is not the end.

3. **Death as sleep** - It really is interesting how alike death and sleep are - What keeps you when you sleep? Who holds you and who sustains you? We display a lot of trust in sleep - there is incredible vulnerability in sleep. Sleep involves a letting go of everything, a suspension of our control over things - a sort of death to control and autonomy. In one sense we truly commit ourselves into the hands of God. We trust ourselves into the sustaining care and power of God - and miracle of all miracles - we awake and rise again - only by the sustaining power of God... There is clearly a liturgy here for us..

#### 4. **Jesus and the Grave**

1. It seems by the first century, the time of Jesus, the Jews had all but forgotten this language of death as sleep for God's people. Jesus revives this, death as sleep, language and is constantly mocked and misunderstood when using it... "They are not dead, but sleeping." - The crowds laugh and jeer, some get angry - how dare he be so insensitive!
2. Mark 5 (Jesus Story Book Bible)- **"Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those *who were* with Him, and entered where the child was lying. Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement."** - Mark 5:38-42
3. And wonder of all wonders the people that die, and are touched by Jesus - it is as though they were only sleeping. They wake right up, and go about their merry lives.
4. In the early church there was an intentional shunning of the term death, and the typical reaction to it, because of the triumph of Jesus' Resurrection.
5. In Jesus, death is nothing more than a nap from which the righteous will awaken to an endless day!! (1 corinthians 15:20)

6. For those who are in Jesus - the grave becomes a positive symbol and reminder of our ultimate hope - Everything that one has will be removed and only what cannot be shaken shall remain.
  1. Why?
  2. Because of what Jesus has done - Taking the judgment our sin deserves at the cross, dying in our place, taking on the devil, killing death and its power in his death, rising again so we could be brought to God the Father, ascending to the right hand of God, having all authority and power to judge and to restore - For all who trust in him - One day you will lay your head down for the last time, and fall asleep - but you have this incredible hope if you are in Jesus, if you belong to him - you will hear the words of the resurrected Son of God say to you - "my little child, arise, it's time to get up". And you will open your eyes to see the glorious risen Lord, awakened to an endless day, a glorious day.
  3. Church - what if we used sleep as a liturgy to think on and remind us of what Jesus did for us - his death and resurrection - and to think of our great hope that we have in him.
  4. What if we actually saw death - the worst thing that could ever happen as an already defeated foe? Through the daily rhythm of sleep we can be reminded how the Lord Jesus underwent death for everyone of us, that through death he might destroy the works of the devil ....that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. And that God raised him up again, and has seated him at his right hand - ruling with all power and authority - authority and power to raise us up on the Last Day!
  5. When we lay down in sleep we release ourselves to him we surrender, and suspend all control- total trust - may this remind us of our one comfort in both life and death is that we are not our own but belong with body and soul, both in life and death to my faithful savior Jesus Christ....And when we rise the next morning we worship his name for his faithfulness and goodness to sustain us and resurrect us - In all this we look forward to that day when the Lord will resurrect us to enjoy his new world - life without end.

6. Church use the rhythm of sleep as a reminder to practice this resurrection hope in Jesus.