



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 4:23-25

Romans

"Raised for Our Justification"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text is Romans chapter 4 and we're going to look at the last verses, verses 23-25. We have been reading throughout this great fourth chapter of the book that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

And we read in verse 23, "Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our study together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do say amen to the great truths that are contained in these three verses that we will consider this morning. And we pray You'd bless us as we do study them. Give us a great appreciation of who You are and the God who raises the God and the God who raised a particular individual from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in so doing, proved Him to be just that, our Lord. And help us to appreciate what He did that occasioned that resurrection, which is die for us, die in our place and pay the penalty for our sins and pay the debt that we had accumulated because of our sins. And help us to understand and appreciate the significance of the resurrection, of why it occurred, what that means to us.

Just three verses, Father, but very significant verses, and we pray that You'd teach us from them and strengthen our faith and give us a greater grounding in the truths of Your word, that we might know who we are as Your people, what it means to be Your people.

Well, we are Your people, Father, because of Your grace, not because of anything in us. As you surveyed fallen humanity, You did not see a little spark of good in some of us and then choose us and draw us from this lost lump of clay, but saw nothing good in us. We were no different from anyone else. By Your grace You've saved us, and that is unfathomable in its truth and greatness, and we pray that You'd help us to understand some of these things as we study, and appreciate what we are in Christ. We do thank You for Him, for the gift of Jesus Christ and the life we have in Him. May He be exalted in our worship and in our study together this morning.

This is how we grow, Father, as we study, as we praise You, as we live by faith and walk by faith, and we pray that we would be men and women who know what we believe and live lives that are obedient in the midst of a unrighteousness, a disobedient world.

Father, we live in this world with all of its difficulties and problems, with all of its cares that are pressed upon us, and we live in a world that is powerful, that seeks to conform to us its image. We feel the pressure constantly. And so we are a people with many needs - spiritual needs, physical needs, and we pray for those as well.

We pray for the sick. We pray that You'd give healing. But we also know, Lord, that's not will to always heal. And ultimately those who are healed suffer fatal illness. And so Father, in the midst of difficulty, we pray that You'd give encouragement. We certainly have a text of scripture that speaks to that.

And we pray for those in our midst that are undergoing physical hardship and suffering, that You would give them great encouragement. Pray for those that are in need of employment, or those who are just discouraged from the cares and the hardships of life, that You would give them encouragement and give them

opportunities. Bless them in many ways. We thank You for the blessings that You have given to us, which are many. Help us to appreciate them. Help us to be thankful.

We pray for those that are away on vacations or business. We pray that You'd give them protection and give them diligence, if it's work that calls them away, and if they are vacationing, give them good rest and safe return.

Bless our time this evening, Lord, as we gather together here to remember our Lord and to worship Him. May it be a good service, and bless our time now together as we sing our final hymn, as we consider this text of scripture together. May all that we do be done well. May it be done to Your glory and to our edification. We pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] The question is sometimes asked, "Which is more important to the Christian faith, the death of Christ or His resurrection?" Maybe you've asked that question yourself. It's a valid question, but also an unanswerable one, because both are essential and inseparable. Without the one, the other's meaningless. Both are crucial to Christianity, which raises the question of why that is.

Why did Christ die? And what is the meaning of the resurrection? Did He actually rise from the dead? Or is it enough to believe that He lives on spiritually, even if He wasn't raised bodily? Well, these are questions that Paul answers in a brief and precise way in our text here in Romans 3:24 and 25. Important verses. In fact, Martin Luther said, "In these verses, the whole of Christianity is comprehended." They bring to a conclusion a larger discussion that Paul has developed in this fourth chapter regarding faith and the blessing of justification that results from it.

That is the major theme of this book of Romans. We have stressed that from the beginning of our study on, that the great theme of the book of Romans is justification by faith. Or to make it a fuller declaration, justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And faith has been the particular subject of chapter 4. Abraham

is Paul's example of saving faith and he develops his faith from two Old Testament passages, Genesis chapter 15 and Genesis chapter 17.

Genesis 15, you'll remember, the Lord promised Abraham that his descendants would be many. They would be like the stars of the heavens, even though Abraham at that time did not have a child of his own. Still he believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. He believed the promise that God had made and he was declared righteousness. He was forgiven and completely accepted by God, accepted as righteous in His site, as perfect. He wasn't a perfect man, never became a perfect man in his flesh in this life, but at that moment God declared him righteous. God considered him to be perfect.

Genesis 15, well, years pass and we come to Genesis 17 and God again appeared to Abraham. He was still without the child of promise. He'd had a child in the meantime through Hagar, his wife's bondservant, but that child, Ishmael, was not the child of promise. The child of promise would come through Sarah, and again the Lord makes a great promise to him, that he would be the father of a multitude. In fact, He expands the promise at this point. He says he will be the father of a multitude of nations, not just a great nation, but he will be the father of a multitude of nations.

Well, Abraham was now 99 years old and he was unable to father children. Sarah was 90 years old and she was barren. Abraham understood this. He knew his own condition, knew it quite well. Knew the condition of his wife, knew the circumstances in which the promise had been given and knew that the circumstances were against it all, that it was beyond human possibility of fulfillment.

In spite of that, he believed the Lord, because, as Paul wrote, back in verse 17 of chapter 4, he believed that God "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." He's the Creator. He creates all things ex nihilo, out of nothing. Now, God who can create everything out of nothing could do anything. He could even raise the dead. He can give life to a dead person. He can cause a dead

man, a man's who's dead in regard to producing children to be able to do that. And so Abraham believed.

Now, that explains a lot about the nature of faith. Faith is not ignoring reality. Faith is not burying one's head in the sand and pretending that reality isn't what it is. Faith is not believing what we know is not true. These are some of the ideas that people have about faith, that it is irrational. Faith is not irrational. It is completely rational. It is well-reasoned trust in God and in the promises of God. In hope against hope, Abraham believed, because it was God's promise that He believed Him and therefore is believable.

Now that's reasonable, is it not? That's completely rational, isn't it? If God Almighty makes a promise to you, isn't it rational to believe that it's true and it will happen just as He says? The God who calls into being, that which does not exist, the God who gives life to the dead, what can't He do? It's completely rational to believe what God says, simply because God says it. On no other basis, no other grounds than that. And Abraham could do that, because he knew the character of God, that He is good for all His promises.

Faith is in God's word. It is in His truth. It is unwavering, as we saw, as we looked at Abraham's faith, as it was analyzed and explained by Paul in the previous passage. And it gives all the glory to God. That is what Abraham did. "He was made strong in faith," Paul wrote, "giving glory to God." Which is to say he took no credit for anything for himself, not even for the origin of his faith. It all goes to God, all the glory. Abraham understood that. He believed what was promised, not what was seen. That is justifying faith. That is saving faith, taking God's word at face value in spite of the circumstances.

Now, we might think that Abraham was an unusual man, and he certainly was an unusual man. He's one of the giants of the Old Testament. Maybe we could say the giant of the Old Testament. It's a man of great faith. You look at his life and you can't help but be greatly impressed. He was called at the age of 75 out of Ur of the Chaldeans. His home, place where he'd grown up, where his family was,

and in obedience he left and he went to a land that he had not seen and had not traveled to before.

Against all hope he believed God's promise to make him a great nation. That's great faith. We admire that. We take that as a kind of pattern for our lives. But Paul didn't cite Abraham as an example for praise, but as a model of faith, to show that people of the Old Testament were saved in the same way as people in the New Testament are saved. It is through faith alone.

What was true of Abraham is true of everyone who is saved. Paul says that in verses 23 and 24. "Now, not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also." Abraham was an exceptional man in many ways. But in other ways, Abraham was not exceptional. His faith is an example of God's method of justification in every age, from beginning to end. All who believe in God's word, as Abraham did, all will be saved as Abraham was saved. All who believe will receive the righteousness that God credits to them through faith alone.

And in these last verses of the chapter, Paul gives in summary fashion the word of God, or the gospel, that a person must believe in order to be saved, that a person must believe in order to be justified, to be declared righteous and acceptable before God. In them, as Luther said, the whole of Christianity is comprehended.

And in them Paul makes essentially three points. First, who God is. Second, what happened at the cross. And third, why the resurrection occurred. So the outline is very simple. Who, what, why? Who God is, the God whom we believe; who is the object of our faith in this saving faith? And what God did through Christ on the cross. And then thirdly, why the resurrection happened.

The first point that Paul makes in this summary of the Christian faith is that God is the God of the resurrection. Saving faith is, first of all, in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. That's the starting point. Not a general belief in God, not a belief in a supreme being. That is never enough for saving faith. James tells us that in

James chapter 2, that the devils themselves believe in God, believe that God is one, believe in the one true God. They know who He is. They know Him better than many of us do. But they believe with trembling. They believe with great fear. It doesn't save them.

It's not enough to believe that God is one, even to have great knowledge of God. That's never enough for saving faith. And the value of faith is always measured in its object. Talked about that at some length last week, but it's worth repeating and underscoring. The value of our faith is not in the strength of our faith, the intensity of our faith, the commitment of our faith. It's in what our faith is committed to. It's the object of our faith. A person can skate out on thin ice completely confident, absolutely certain that that ice is going to hold him or her up. And that's not going to do that person any good. Thin ice will not hold a person up.

The value is not the faith. It's the object of the faith. It's not the faith that sustains a person. It's not the faith that holds a person up. It's the object of that faith. It's the object that saves. It's the object that's all-important. If the object is weak, if the object is false, the faith is worthless.

And so we come first here to the object of faith. Paul defines that very specifically in terms of the resurrection so that the faith that justifies is the faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead, whom Paul calls our Lord. That in fact is what God said about Jesus in the resurrection, that He is more than a mere man, that He is Lord, that He is God incarnate.

Paul said that back in 1:4. Perhaps you remember that far back. That's where he writes that Christ was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. That is the first great thing that God said in the resurrection, that this one who is raised is no mere man. He's God's Son. He is very God a very God, and justifying faith, saving faith, believes that, believes that God raised Jesus from the dead and that Jesus is His Son. He is, as Paul puts it here, our Lord, our God. He is the eternal Son of God. True man, He took to

Himself a genuine human nature. That's implied in the resurrection. But what that resurrection declares is that that man who was raised from the dead is no mere man. He is the very Son of God. He is the Creator of all things.

Well, that's the first point that God makes, who God is. He is Abraham believed Him to be - God who gives life to the dead. That means more than just a God who's able to raise the dead. It means the God who did raise the dead, who raised His own Son from the dead. And so to believe in Him is to believe not only that He is one who can do that, but that He did that in history. He raised a particular individual from the dead, and the one He raised from the dead is our Lord and our God Jesus Christ.

The second point is what God did at the cross. That is, what occasioned this resurrection from the dead, and Paul makes that point in verse 25, where he states that Christ was "delivered over because of our transgressions." He was delivered over to death by whom? Who delivered Him over? God Himself. It is very important to understand that. We can't understand the cross of Christ, we can't understand the Christian faith, unless we understand that God the Father put His own Son to death.

Down through the centuries, there have been those who have emphasized that men killed Christ; the Jews delivered Him over to the Romans and they have been blamed for it as a race down through history. Both the Jews and the Romans played a part in the Lord's death and the New Testament recognizes that, very clearly recognizes their guilt. We see that from the outset of the church, in Acts 2:23, when Peter preached the first sermon of the church, the sermon on the day of Pentecost. He states that Jesus was "nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men." In verse 36, he tells the Jew audience that is listening to him, this multitude of Jewish men and women, he tells them that they crucified Christ. He lays the blame upon them. And then in verse 38 he tells them to repent. Why are they to repent?

Because they were guilty and they were to recognize that and turn from them.

In Acts 4:27, he names. He says, "Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel." He says they were guilty of carrying out that deed of the crucifixion. So both Jews and Gentiles played a part. Both Jews and Gentiles are guilty of that heinous crime. But they were only agents. They were only instruments in God's greater purpose, because Peter also states in Acts chapter 4, in that same prayer, that they did whatever God's hand and purpose predestined to occur.

In Acts 2:23, he states that Christ was "delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God." It happened. It was carried out by the hands of wicked men, but it all followed the plan of God, the eternal plan of God for salvation.

Jesus was not a martyr. His death was not some tragic mistake. It was purposed by God from all eternity, and the reason is given in those two words in our text, "our transgressions." He was delivered over because of us.

God took our offences. He took our crimes, He took our sins, and He put them on Christ so that He became our substitute. He became our sin bearer. He became the one who died in our place, because there, as those sins were placed upon Him on the cross, He was punished for them in our place. That's the nature of His death, a substitutionary atonement, a penal substitutionary atonement. He suffered punishment for our sins in our place.

To illustrate what happened, the substitutionary nature of the cross, Donald Grey Barnhouse, in his exposition on this text, recounts the incident of Barabas, as you know, was a notorious robber and murderer who had been arrested by the Romans. He was set to be executed at the time of our Lord's trial, but Pilate, who had no love for Barabas - no doubt he had been relieved and overjoyed when Barabas had been apprehended and placed in prison. But now Pilate saw an opportunity out of a difficult situation, and Barabas was going

to be the means of extricating him from that. He tried to use Barabas as a way out of condemning Christ. He gave the people an option. He would release Jesus to them, or Barabas, thinking that they would choose Christ over a criminal. They didn't, of course, as you know. They called for Barabas to be released and Christ to be crucified.

Barnhouse imagines how all of this must have occurred to Barabas, and he pictures him in his prison cell that day, waiting for the executioners to come. Outside he could hear crosses being made and no doubt he began to think about his own death. And as he heard the hammers pounding away on the wood, he looked at the palms of his hands and he imagined the nails piercing them and thinking of himself being nailed to the cross that was being made for him, and became increasingly anxious.

Then he hears what he thinks is his name. He hears people crying out, "Barabas," and hears the voice of an angry mob saying, "Crucify him, crucify him," and he thinks they're calling for his blood. Suddenly the door opens, a Roman guard enters his cell, removes his chain, and he thinks, "Well, this is it. Time has come and I'm going to die," and the adrenaline begins to flow, and the guard looks at him and says, "You're free."

He stands up; he's in shock. Stunned by the news, he can't imagine what's happened. He moves out of the cell into the crowd and begins to follow them in the procession up to Golgotha, where he watched the Romans drive the nails into Jesus' hands, lift Him up on the cross, and he knew that Jesus had died in his place. An innocent man for a guilty man.

Barnhouse writes, "Now, Barabas was the only man in the world who could say that Jesus Christ took his physical place." But I can say that Jesus Christ took my spiritual place. Every believer in Jesus Christ can say that. We are guilty. We deserve to die. We deserve the full weight of God's wrath. That is the wage of sin - death; physical death, eternal death. God's punishment is what we deserve, Romans 6:23. But Christ died as our substitute. God satisfied His justice by

punishing our transgressions in Christ so that we could go free. He is a propitiation. He satisfied God's wrath and He turned that wrath aside.

That is why the cross is at the very center of the Christian faith. Without the cross, there is no gospel. Without it, Christian is just another helpless religion of ethics and good works. And I say a helpless religion, because without the cross, there's no atonement for sin. There is no satisfaction of the wrath of God, of the justice of God. There's no reconciliation between God and man.

The hostility that Paul will later write about in chapter 8 still pertains. It still exists. We're at war with God and God with us, if the cross did not happen. Only the cross of Christ accomplishes salvation. Only the cross of Christ atones for our sin, and that is why God purposed His Son's death. That is why He was delivered over, because of our transgressions, because He was. As Barnhouse writes, Christianity can be expressed in three phrases: "I deserved hell; Jesus took my hell; there is nothing left for me but His heaven." Now, that's the gospel. That's the good news. Let me read that again, because that puts it quite well. "I deserved hell; Jesus took my hell; there is nothing left for me but His heaven." Good news.

The gospel of Jesus Christ. But the question can be raised, how do we know it's true? How do we know that our transgressions have all been punished in a substitute and that Christ's death for us was really successful? We know He set out to do that, but did He really accomplish it? Well, how could we know that?

And that brings us to Paul's third point, the resurrection. He's already mentioned it, and so the fact that he has mentioned it and comes back to it, mentions it twice in our text, indicates the importance of the resurrection in the mind of Paul. But here he writes that Jesus was raised because of our justification.

Now, if you have the King James version before you, that reads a little differently from the text that I'm reading, because there you read, "For our justification," which suggests that the resurrection was

the basis of our justification. It is not. And in 5:9, Paul makes that very clear. He writes that justification is based upon Christ's death, not upon His resurrection. He writes, "Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God."

Paul wrote that Christ died for our sins. We read that in the New Testament. Christ died for our sins. But nowhere in the New Testament is it written that Christ rose for our sins. Christ's victory over sin and death and the devil occurred on the cross. That is where He defeated our enemies and gained salvation for us. That is where He obtained forgiveness and life for the believer. It was on the cross. That is where victory occurred. What is it that washes our sins away? It's the blood of Christ. It's not our faith, it's not the resurrection. It is Christ's death. That is where the victory occurred.

So the question now arises, why then the resurrection? Why was it necessary if He won the victory by His death? And the answer is the resurrection was necessary in order to confirm the success of Christ's mission, to confirm the efficacy or the effectiveness of His death. The resurrection is the proof that Christ made a full payment for our sins and actually accomplished our salvation.

And so the text that I'm reading from, the New American Standard Bible, is better here. "He was delivered up because of our transgressions" and raised not for our justification, but "because of our justification." In other words, He was raised because justification had been completed. It had been obtained. The resurrection was God's vindication of His Son. It was the endorsement of His work of salvation. It was the proof that God had accepted the sacrifice of His Son. Or as Dr. Johnson put it, "It is God's amen to Christ's 'It is finished.'" The resurrection signifies that our forgiveness is a fact. It gives the assurance that we can never experience the judgment to come and that we as believers in Jesus Christ need never fear death and the grave.

We could not have had that assurance apart from the resurrection. Christ promised to save us, and we have many examples

of that. One of the best statements, greatest statements, along that line is in Matthew 20:28. He said that He came to give His life "a ransom for many." He came to buy us out of the slavery of sin. He came to deliver us by the payment of a ransom, that of His own life; in His death, deliver us from the judgment to come.

But how do we know He accomplished that? How do we know that the ransom that was paid was accepted? His sacrifice could only be accepted if it was pure, if it was sinless. We see that illustrated in the Old Testament, in the Levitical sacrifices. The lamb that was offered up had to be pure, had to be spotless, couldn't have a defect. And that was a picture of the ultimate sacrifice, Christ, who would be morally perfect. He offered Himself up as a spotless lamb of God. He offered Himself as one who had never sinned, as pure and perfect. One who did not have to atone for His own sins because He had none, so He could be the atonement for our sins. But how do we know He didn't sin while He was on the cross? How do we know that He didn't break down in the midst of His great agony, His pain and His loneliness and during those periods of darkness? How do we know that something bad did not happen and He did not fail so that His offering wasn't perfect?

Now, that question remained during the three days that His body was in the tomb. And if in fact the third day had come and gone and His body remained in the tomb, turned to dust and His bones were still with us today, we could not know that He had actually made atonement for our sins - couldn't know that. In fact, Christ's corpse would really prove the opposite. It would be the proof that God had not accepted His sacrifice, because Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins." In other words, if Christ has not been raised, God did not accept the sacrifice and there's no hope.

But what in fact happened was Christ's dead body was laid in the tomb on a Friday afternoon, and on Sunday morning, the third day, God breathed life into it. Christ rose, He opened the tomb, He

appeared to His disciples, and not only to His disciples, but to many people. In fact, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that He appeared to over 500 people at one time, giving ample proof, tangible proof, that He had been raised from the dead. When Paul was writing this book of Romans and talking about the resurrection, many of those 500 were still alive and could bear testimony to what he said.

So He rose from the dead and then He ascended bodily into heaven. A large company of people were with Him on the Mount of Olives when He ascended physically, bodily, until He was taken up into a cloud, taken into heaven, where He is now sitting enthroned at the Father's right hand praying for us. In that way God demonstrated before a large company of people that He has accepted the atonement that Jesus Christ made. The resurrection is the proof that God accepted the payment that Christ made for our sins, in much the same way that we have proof of the payment of the transactions that you and I make every day.

When, for example, at the end of the month, the middle of the month, the American Express or Visa sends you a statement itemizing your expenditures and the amount that you owe that company, you are in debt to them. You owe them. And so what do you do? Take your checkbook out. You write a check for the full amount and pay off what you owe. And once the check clears the bank that that company uses, and they stamp that check with the name of that bank indicating that it has been processed, it's gone through the bank, and it comes back to you, that is then your receipt. It is the proof of your payment. That company can no longer collect the bill from you again. If they were to try to do that, you could produce that check with the stamp on the back and it would be the proof that you had paid in full and that you are free from that obligation.

Now, in much the same way, Christ paid for our sins at Calvary when He died in our place. He cancelled out the certificate of debt that we owed. When Jesus dismissed His spirit, God stamped out bill "Paid in full." And the empty tomb is the proof of that payment. It is

the evidence that God accepted it, that all our debts have been cleared and that we are free from obligation forever.

The evangelist and teacher of a generation or two ago, R.A. Torrey, put it this way: "I look at the cross of Christ and I know that atonement has been made for my sins. I look at the open sepulcher and the risen and ascended Lord, and I know that the atonement has been accepted." The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the historical proof of the forgiveness of all who have believed in Him.

But it's not just that. It's also the proof that we have a living Savior. He's not dead. He is alive and bestows on us the salvation that He won for us on the cross, and through the Holy Spirit enables us to share in the merits of His death and to live in the power of His resurrection. And so the resurrection is not only the proof of our justification, it is the proof of our sanctification. It is the proof of our new life, because through faith in Jesus Christ, we are joined to Him. We are placed in Him and into His life. And through that union with Him, we are able to live a life that would otherwise be impossible.

Of ourselves, we're weak. We have no strength. In Christ we're new creatures, all things are new. We have new minds, we have new hearts. We're new creatures. And yet we still have weaknesses. In chapter 7 Paul develops that. He talks about the struggle of the Christian life. It's a great struggle. It goes on from beginning to end. It never ends. We never reach a point where we come to that higher plateau and everything's easy and we can even become sinless. Not the case. We struggle to the very end. Paul develops that in chapter 7. In fact, he says, "I am sold under sin." And even though I am free, I'm still in his grip. It's still within me." There is this law, this principle of sin that keeps me from doing the things that I want to do and causes me to do the things I don't want to do. And that is our struggle.

And so that's our condition. We're easily overcome by temptation. But Christ gives power. He lives through us, so that as we walk by faith, as we live in obedience to Him, we experience His life and we have victory over temptation. We have victory over sin. That's

the work of Christ within us. And because He lives, we too will live forever. The resurrection is the proof of that. It's the guarantee of that. Because our Savior rose from the dead, we who have believed in Him will also be raised. The resurrection is the proof of our justification. It's the proof of our sanctification. It's the proof of our glorification that we will have a resurrection and we will have eternal life forever.

It's the ground of our hope. Apart from it, we would have no hope at all. In John 14:19, Jesus told His disciples, "Because I live, you shall live also." That's the great hope. That's the greatest hope, the hope that carries us through life, that carries us through the trials of life, and that will carry us through the greatest trial of all.

James Boice, in a couple of his books, tells of an interesting account - actually, two interesting accounts that happened at the end of the 19th century, in the year 1899 when two famous Americans died. They died very different deaths. One was an unbeliever and the other was a believer.

The unbeliever was Robert Ingersoll, a name that probably is not very familiar to most of us today, but it was quite familiar in his day. He was well-known as a politician and he was the son of a congregational minister who became famous for his attacks on orthodox Christian beliefs. He was known as the great agnostic and was a very effective orator who toured the country, lecturing against such doctrines as immortality and the resurrection.

But in 1899, he died suddenly and his death came as a terrible shock to his family. The body was kept in the home for several days, because his wife could not bear to part with it. It was eventually removed, because the corpse was decaying and was a health hazard for the family. Eventually it was cremated and the scene at the crematorium was so dismal that it was picked up by the newspapers and communicated to the nation.

It was an example of how a person may boldly reject the truth, may boldly reject the resurrection, preach against it, lecture against it,

but when death comes, as it comes to all of us, when death comes, family and friends are left without hope.

Later that same year the evangelist Dwight L. Moody, but his death was very different. It was triumphant. He'd been declining for some years and his family had taken turns with him at his bedside, and on the morning of his death, his son was nearby and heard him exclaim, "Earth is receding. Heaven is opening up. God is calling." They thought he was dreaming, but he was very alert. In fact, he seemed to be reviving. When he began to slip away, he said, "Is this death? This is not bad. There's no valley. This is bliss." His daughter began to pray for his recovery, but he stopped her. He said, "God is calling. This is my coronation day. I've been looking forward to it."

Shortly after that he died. At the funeral, the family and friends had a joyful service. They sang hymns, they heard the words of Paul from 1 Corinthians 15, "O death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, death is not always that glorious for the believer. Christians die hard deaths and Christians can even enter into death with fear and trembling and doubt. But the end is always glorious for every believer in Jesus Christ. It is always certain, because of Christ, not because of our faith, not because of the strength of it, but because of the One in whom we have believed, the One in whom we have trusted, and because of what He has done. Christ has settled the issue of sin and death and judgment, and His death assures us victory. His death on the cross is our victory. His triumph over the grave is our triumph as well.

So which is more important, the death of Christ or His resurrection? Both are important. There can be no salvation from sin unless there is a living savior. And so Paul emphasizes the resurrection in these few verses. But the living Savior can only be a Savior, because He has died.

Both are important and both are to be believed, because in them we have the gospel of salvation in Christ who died and was raised from the dead. So just as Abraham believed God's promise and was justified, reckoned as righteous, so too we must believe the gospel. That's what makes a man or a woman a Christian, not good works, but faith.

As Paul wrote back in verse 5 of chapter 4, "But to the one who does not work ,but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." That's the answer to Job's ancient question, "How can a man be just with God?" It's through faith in the substitute, the one who died in our place, paid for our sins, and was raised from the dead.

Have you done that? Have you believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior? If not, you must understand that you are not right with God. You may be right with your wife, or right with your husband, or right with your neighbors. You may be right with your fellow men. You may be a good citizen. You may be a good this or that, and you could go down the list of all the good things you are, but you are not right with God. You have fallen short of His standard. We all do. And His standard is perfection. And none of us is perfect, except Christ, Christ alone, and we receive His righteousness and God's forgiveness through faith in Him.

So if you're here this morning without Christ, look to Him. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The moment you do that, you're received by God, you're accepted by God, you're clothed in the righteousness of Christ; you have forgiveness, you have eternal life, and it is eternal. Cannot be taken from you and will not, and praise God for that. May God bless all of us with the assurance of that and the joy that it should produce. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace, all that we have from You, because it's all a gift, Father. What we have, we have by grace. What we have, we have received through faith alone. You sent Your Son into this world to die for sinners. He

was a great teacher, the greatest teacher that ever lived. He was a great example, the greatest example to ever live. We can admire the Lord Jesus Christ in many ways.

But He did not come to be a great teacher, He did not come to be an example. Not those things alone, not primarily those things. He came to be a sacrifice. He came to die for sinners. He came to save His people from their sins and He did that. He accomplished that and we know that He did, because You raised Him from the dead. And we have the confidence that having believed in Him, you will raise us from the dead as well. We thank You for that, Father. We thank You that this life is brief and it's not the end. The best is yet to come, by Your grace. We thank You for Christ and it's in His name we pray.  
Amen.