

## I. Introduction

Good morning! It is a joy for Karen and I to be back with our OIC family this morning. We have gone through some trials the past couple of months, but the Lord has been with us and He has brought us safely home to Osaka. We give thanks to the Lord, and we also want to thank all of you for your prayers and encouragement.

Not only did many of you send encouraging online notes or cards in the mail, but when we got home last Sunday evening, we even found our door decorated with welcome balloons and goodies, and when I went to the office on Tuesday, I found more flowers, cookies, and notes on my desk. You didn't need to do these things, but it gave us a big smile; thank you very much! All of you are a blessing to us!



We all need encouragement, and I pray that we can all encourage one another and, even more, I pray that we can all receive the encouragement of the Lord. Paul expressed a similar thought in **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17**, **“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”**

Notice the word, “eternal,” in this verse. That is a good bridge for us into today's topic, because today we are going to talk about resurrection and about eternal life. We have had a long break, but today I would like to resume our study of Acts. In Acts Chapter 1, the disciples witnessed Jesus' ascension into heaven; in Acts 2, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and then in Acts 3, the Lord did an amazing miracle through Peter and John when they went up to the temple to pray. A man who had been crippled from birth was dramatically healed. This created an opportunity for Peter to preach to the crowd at the temple, and Peter delivered a powerful message about Jesus and proclaimed, in **Acts 3:15**, **“You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.”**

Notice that Peter is preaching the resurrection of Jesus here. From the beginning the church, the church has always proclaimed the resurrection. Jesus died on the cross, but He rose from the grave and He is alive now and forever. Amen! The resurrection of Jesus is central to the Christian faith because it means that we serve a living Lord and it is the proof of the promise of eternal life for all who follow Jesus. Because of the resurrection, we know that death is defeated and that the sacrifice of Jesus' on the cross was acceptable to Father God as payment for the sins of the world.

Because of the resurrection, the cross is beautiful. Have you ever thought about that? If Jesus had stayed dead, the cross would have remained a symbol of death and shame. But because Jesus rose from the dead, the cross has become a thing of beauty, representing the entrance to resurrection and eternal life.



Today, we will start on Acts 4, where Peter and John are at the temple preaching. Let's look and see what kind of reaction they get from their message. Let's read Acts 4:1-4

## II. Scripture Acts 4:1-4 (NIV 1984)

1 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. 2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. 4 But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

### III. Teaching

You may remember that at the close of Acts 2, there was a total of about three thousand believers. In today's passage, where only the men are counted, the number has increased to about five thousand. The fellowship of believers who have trusted in Jesus is growing rapidly, and by the time that we finish Acts we will see how the church spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond in just three or four decades.



The rapid growth of the church was viewed with alarm by the Jewish authorities, but what really made them angry in this passage was the resurrection. Take a closer look at **Acts 4:2**, **“They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.”** From the phrasing here, it seems that Peter and John were probably using the resurrection of Jesus as an example to teach about the promise of resurrection for all believers. This made the authorities so angry that they had them thrown in jail. Who were these authorities and why should they be so angry about the proclamation of the resurrection? Well, Acts 4:1 specifically mentioned the Sadducees, a Jewish sect that rejected the doctrine of the resurrection. The Jews of that time did not all believe the same doctrines; they were divided into various sects, the two most prominent sects being the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Later on, we will see how Paul uses the differences between these groups to his advantage when he was on trial in Acts 23. Here is a sneak preview, **Acts 23:6-8**, **“Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.” When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)”**

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. That is why they were “sad, you see.” Okay, it is a bad joke. But it will help us to remember that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. And this is very sad, because it shows that they rejected the teachings of Scripture and the clear evidence of Jesus' resurrection. Most of the teaching about the resurrection is in the New Testament, but the Old Testament also clearly teaches the resurrection in a number of passages. For example, **Isaiah 26:19**, says, **“But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.”**

This verse speaks very clearly about the resurrection. But the Sadducees refused to believe. Sadly, there are still many people who refuse to believe in the resurrection. But why should the resurrection be hard to believe in? The Bible teaches us that God created the heavens and the earth. If we accept this, then the resurrection is easy to accept. God had the power to create all things, so God certainly has the power to raise the dead. And, the Scripture records, and the evidence of history supports, that God did raise Jesus from the dead.

This isn't blind faith; look at how Paul appeals to the evidence of eyewitnesses in **1 Corinthians 15:3-6**. **“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.”**

The Bible points to the evidence of the resurrection. And, when we look at history, we notice that the extremely rapid growth of the early church cannot adequately be explained without recognizing the influence of the many eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive, risen from the grave. Peter and the other apostles, and many more disciples, had met the risen Lord Jesus. This, together with work of the Holy Spirit, gave their preaching and testimony incredible power. And so, as history records, the church grew and grew and grew, even under heavy persecution.

If you have been coming to OIC for some time, then these are things you know, because we have

talked about these things many times. But today I want to go on to another topic that we have not talked about quite as much. Let's take a few minutes to talk about the nature of the resurrection. First of all, although the Bible records a number of miracles when the dead were raised, the resurrection of Jesus is completely different than the other resurrection miracles.

Do you remember the story of Lazarus in John 11? Lazarus was dead and buried for four days before Jesus called him out of the grave. But when Jesus called, Lazarus came forth alive (Painting: Duccio di Buoninsegna, The Raising of Lazarus, 1310–11). Can you imagine how powerful Lazarus' testimony must have been? But, as recorded in church tradition, thirty years later Lazarus died again. The resurrection of Lazarus was not a resurrection unto eternal life; it was just a temporary restoration and extension of Lazarus' mortal life.



On the other hand, the resurrection of Jesus is a resurrection unto eternal life. After Jesus rose from the grave and showed Himself to the disciples, He ascended into heaven and is still alive today and forever and forever. And, on the final day, Jesus will come again and show Himself to all. When Jesus ascended into heaven, an angel appeared and told the disciples (**Acts 1:11b**), **“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”** The very same Jesus who went into heaven will return; He is alive for all of eternity.

The resurrection of Jesus is a resurrection to eternal life in a glorified body. The glorified body is real; it is not an illusion. The resurrected Jesus ate and drank with the disciples. They spoke with Him; they touched Him; they walked with Him. The glorified resurrection body is real, but it is not limited like our mortal bodies. The resurrection body can enter a locked room, as Jesus did in John 20. The resurrection body can ascend into heaven as Jesus did in Acts 1. And the resurrection body never grows old and dies; it is alive forever. Amazingly, the Scripture promises that all of us who believe in Jesus will receive this eternal life in a glorified, resurrection body.

Some people imagine that life in heaven will be body-less and that we won't have fellowship with each other or enjoy eating and drinking in heaven. But that is not what Scripture teaches. Do you remember what Jesus said to His disciples after He passed the cup at the Last Supper? In **Matthew 26:29**, Jesus said, **“I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.”** In heaven, there is going to be a great banquet and we will share wonderful food and the most excellent cup of wine with Jesus our Lord. To do that, we will need bodies, and Scripture tells us we will have them.

In **1 Corinthians 15**, Paul uses the example of how a seed becomes a full-grown plant, then in verses **42-44** he tells us, **“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”** Analogies, including this one, are incomplete, they can't answer every question. But there is a very powerful truth here. Mortal bodies die, and are planted in the ground like so many seeds. Even cremation and towering tombs don't change this fact; eventually it all sinks into the ground. But if death and return to dust is certain; then it is equally certain that those who have trusted in Jesus will be raised to glory.

#### IV. Conclusion

The promises of God are sure and certain. And the promise of resurrection to eternal life in heaven is Good News of great hope. The things of this fallen world, including our weak, mortal bodies, are temporary and uncertain. But the hope and promise of the resurrection give us strength and confidence in the midst of the trials of life. Our lives and our labors are not in vain; they are for the glory of God. Nothing is lost, because all good things are restored in the resurrection and in the new heavens and new earth that God has promised. Let's close for today with Paul's words from **1 Corinthians 15: 58**, **“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”** Let's pray.

## V. Prayer

Dear heavenly Father,

We give thanks to you for the wonders of your promises, given through the prophets and recorded in Scripture. Thank you that you have prepared a way of salvation, a bridge called the cross that makes it possible for us to cross over from death to eternal life. Thank you that you are preparing a place for us in heaven where we can celebrate with our Lord Jesus at the great feast and live with you forever in peace and joy. Dear loving Lord, I pray that each and every one of us would believe your Word and trust in Jesus and His completed work on the cross so that we might receive your promises through faith. Lord, pour out your Spirit on your people, Lord. Wash us clean and give us times of refreshing. Come now, and meet the needs of your people. You know each and every need. Comfort those who sorrow, strengthen those who are weak, heal those who are sick. Meet the needs of your people out of your endless love and compassion and for your glory. Be glorified, Lord. Be glorified in our lives, our homes, our church and throughout this land. Prepare us, your church, for the time when you will come again in power. In Jesus' precious Name I pray, amen.