

The Greatest Comeback In History
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My sermon today is entitled The Greatest Comeback in History. We all love a good comeback story. A story about those who have been beaten down, overwhelmed, or who have come out of nowhere, out of obscurity or hopeless conditions to beat the odds. You can see comebacks in every area of life. For instance, sports.

In 2017, Super Bowl 51 featured the biggest comeback in Superbowl history. The Atlanta Falcons were beating the New England Patriots 28–3 midway through the third quarter. Deb and I were watching this game with some church members at a Superbowl party. This was the point when we left because we thought the game was over. However, the Patriots scored 25 consecutive points to tie the game in the final seconds of regulation and they went on to win in overtime.

Politically, the king of the comeback has to be Abraham Lincoln. He failed in two business ventures. He was twice elected to public office, but was defeated eight times. But then He made the political comeback of all time when he was elected as the 16th President of the United States.

In the business world Chrysler Corporation takes the prize as one of the biggest comebacks. They were a profitable automobile manufacturer from their inception in 1924 until the 1970's. But, in 1979, financial problems threatened its existence. They hired Lee Iacocca from Ford and with the help of the Federal Government secured a 1.5-billion-dollar loan and tax incentives. They introduced several new cars including the mini-van. Their comeback was so strong that they repaid their loan in three years, and then purchased American Motors, the maker of Jeep. Now that's a comeback story.

I could go on and on with comeback stories from all walks of life. Stories of people who came back from bankruptcy to prosperity – from addiction to freedom – from sickness to health. But all the comebacks that have ever occurred in history – all put together – pale in the light of the Greatest Comeback in History! That comeback is what we are celebrating today – the resurrection of Jesus Christ when He came back from the dead.

There has never been a comeback like the one that took place on that first Easter morning. That comeback says that no matter how dark things may seem, there is always hope. Nothing is over until Jesus says it's over! 1 Peter 1:3 says:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

That's why Christians all around the world are gathering together this Easter

Sunday to celebrate the greatest comeback of all time – the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I remind you that what we now consider to be the victorious defeat of death was, at the time, considered the humiliating loss of a Messiah. After three years of earthly ministry, Jesus was arrested for His claims of being the Son of God. He had preached the good news of the Kingdom of God and performed many miracles on His way to the cross.

But, the religious leaders wanted Jesus dead because of the threat He brought to their control. The Roman government wanted Him dead because of the following He had gained that they saw as a threat to their power. Finally, Satan wanted to kill Jesus because it would ensure his own unthreatened rule on the earth. The crucifixion was the confluence of all three powers in one place when Jesus was nailed to a wooden cross and lifted up between two thieves, bloody, mocked and shamed.

The book of John gives the final account of his life. Jewish leaders captured Jesus as He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. They took Him to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest. Then He was taken to the Roman governor named Pilate. John 19:1-7 says:

Then Pilate took Jesus and had Him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head. They clothed Him in a purple robe and went up to Him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they struck Him in the face... When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw Him, they shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" But Pilate answered, "You take Him and crucify Him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against Him." The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law He must die, because He claimed to be the Son of God."

They went back and forth until John 19:16-30 says:

Finally Pilate handed Him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying His own cross, He went out to the place of the Skull where they crucified Him... When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did... Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When He had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

I want you to notice the numerous times in this passage where it says, “The Scripture was fulfilled.” That’s because:

1- The Resurrection was Prophesied Thousands of Years Earlier

One of the unique and fascinating aspects of the Bible is that no other religious literature has the accuracy of fulfilled prophecy. There are, in fact, 100s of prophecies in the Bible which predicted future events hundreds of years before they happened – with 100% accuracy.

There are over 300 prophecies about the messiah given by 30 prophets over thousands of years – all of which came to pass in one person – Jesus Christ. No other person who has ever lived or ever will live can have all these prophecies come true in their lives. This shows the supernatural origin of Jesus Christ and of the Bible. Romans 16:25-26 says:

This message about Jesus Christ has revealed His plan, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all nations everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey Him.

great detail, God singled out His Son, Jesus Christ, from anyone who has ever lived in history - past, present, or future. The Bible predicts His exact lineage; the place, time and manner of His birth; where and how He would minister, how people would react, how He would die – by crucifixion – and this prophecy was written 800 years before crucifixion even began to be practiced by the Romans. The amazing thing is that all the prophecies of the Messiah were made at least 400 years before He was born.

You could possibly find 1 or 2 prophecies fulfilled in other men, but not all 300 prophecies. That would be like someone predicting today who will be President of the US in 500 years. Not only that, but where they will be born, who their parents would be, what they will do before becoming President, where they will live, how they will die. That’s impossible – with man – but possible with God.

The science of probability says that the chance of just 8 of the Messianic prophecies coming to pass in one individual is 1 in 10^{17} . That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. The chances of just 48 of these prophecies being fulfilled in one person is 1 in 10^{157} (a one followed by 157 zeros!).

To help us understand this staggering figure, suppose we take silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas (approximate area: 263,000 square miles). They will cover all of the state 2 feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes anywhere in the state. But he can pick up only 1 silver dollar, the one that was marked.

What chance would he have of getting the right one? The same exact chance that the prophets had in writing these prophecies and having them all come true in any one man.

This means that the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies alone proves that God inspired the writing of the Bible. It could not have happened any other way. The resurrection of Jesus proves that the Bible is God's word and that Jesus is the only way of salvation. That's why His comeback is the greatest in history!

2- The Resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God

The story of Jesus' final days reveals that all the prophetic scriptures written about Him had come to fruition. What many people saw as a failed plan, was actually part of God's will all along. The final words from Jesus' lips were, "It is finished."

When Jesus said it was finished, as He hung on the cross, He gave up His spirit and He died. To many, this may have seemed like a defeat.

The Evil One thought he had finished Jesus.

The Roman soldiers thought they had finished Jesus.

The religious elite thought that they had finished Jesus.

However, this is not what Jesus meant. He knew that He had fulfilled scripture and He was who He said He was. What was truly finished was the power of sin and death.

The Roman soldiers came to check the 3 men whom they had crucified. Jesus had already died, and the spear thrust in His side was evidence of the fact that He was dead. Surely, some at the foot of the cross would have been distraught. The man who they believed to be the One sent by God to rescue the world had been killed.

Many, however, would have been overjoyed. The Pharisees, the Romans and Satan all thought they had won. It looked like all hope had been lost and the plan of God had been set back. But when Jesus said, "It is finished," what He really meant is that He accomplished everything that the Father sent Him to do on the earth.

After Jesus was crucified, His body was laid in a tomb. Three days later, early in the morning, some women went to the tomb to finish anointing His body for burial. They were resigned to the fact that He was dead, but to their surprise, the tomb was empty. Luke 24:1-8 says:

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their

faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen! Remember how He told you, while He was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered His words.

Of all the images that could possibly demonstrate the hope that we have in a risen Savior, it is the empty tomb that does it best. The truth is that Jesus' death on the cross was not a setback like everyone had thought, but instead, it was the necessary work for Jesus to make a holy comeback and defeat sin and death once and for all.

If Jesus could overcome the finality of death, what can He not overcome within our lives? Nothing can withstand His power, and that should fill us with audacious hope that until Jesus says it is over, it is not over.

The main thrust of the New Testament is that because of the greatest comeback in history, our lives can be changed. That's because:

3- The Resurrection Provides Salvation for all who Believe

Easter reminds us of the mercy and grace of God that makes forgiveness and salvation possible for all of us who believe. We cannot earn forgiveness and salvation. We are not able to rescue ourselves. It was Jesus' sacrificial act on the cross that gives us new life and rescues us from our sin and ultimate death.

As we place our faith, hope, and trust in His resurrected life, we are made new. We are forgiven. We too will experience resurrection and live forever with God.

The truth is that our hope is not found just in the fact that Jesus died on the cross for us. Our hope is found in the fact that He was resurrected from the dead. The resurrection would have been impossible without the cross. But the cross would be meaningless without the resurrection. What do I mean by that? Rome executed thousands of people by crucifixion, but only 1 of those is the Savior of the world because only 1 rose from the dead! The resurrection proves that Christianity is true!

The resurrection sets Christianity apart from all other religions. So many people mistakenly believe all religions are the same. They obviously haven't studied religions because they are vastly different.

Christianity is the only religion that has a Savior.

Christianity is the only religion that has a cross and a resurrection.

Christianity is the only religion that is not based on your own works. Christianity tells us we cannot be good enough on our own.

We have all sinned and we all need forgiveness and a Savior.

Christianity is the only religion whose God says I love you so much that I will give my own Son to die in your place to pay for your sin.

Please understand this – Christianity rises or falls based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Without the resurrection, there is no Christianity,

Without the resurrection, there is no salvation.

Without resurrection, there is no eternal life.

How do I know that? Because the Bible actually says that. 1 Corinthians 15:13-20 says:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless... and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

One of the most important questions we will ever have to face is what we believe about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. At the cross, Jesus died in our place for our sins. That means that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is God in His love saving us from sin and its penalty.

Listen, all of us make messes in life. But to resolve a mess we've made requires admitting we're at fault. And we don't want to admit guilt. Guilt is an uncomfortable feeling, and "sorry" is an uncomfortable word. We'd rather deny it, ignore it, or even justify our actions. But admitting it is painful.

The feeling that we've fallen short, that we've failed, eats away at us. And we will continue to feel that way until we deal with the real issue: sin. Sin means to miss the mark, to fall short of God's glory. Sin is also a rebellion, a turning away from God, a decision to disobey Him or live independent from Him.

And there is a price for sin. Romans 6:23 says: *The wages of sin is death.* Because of sin, we all die. But thank God that verse doesn't end there!

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of the resurrection, our sins can be forgiven! Think of it: Our sins are forgiven because Jesus died and rose again. And the power of sin that kept us bound, that paralyzed us, that held us in the same patterns of failure, is now *broken*. To be *forgiven* is to be *free*. Free from guilt, free from shame, free from the power that enslaved us.

God's love for us resulted in Jesus dying on a cross for us. But He came back from the dead! And if we receive God's free gift of eternal life, it changes everything. What does the resurrection mean to you today?

You might think – “Big deal – a lot of religious leaders have made a lot of claims throughout history. What’s so different about Jesus?” It’s true that many religious leaders have made claims through the centuries. And they all have this in common: they died and you can visit their tombs.

Jesus Christ claimed to be the Son of God who died for the sins of the world. He claimed to give eternal life to all who believed in Him. After He was crucified, He was buried in a borrowed tomb in Jerusalem. I’ve been there and guess what? The tomb of Jesus is empty! He lives and He reigns for all eternity! He’s the One who said in John 11:25-26

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?

That empty tomb shows that Jesus made the greatest comeback in history. The question is: Do you believe this?

Many of you are desperate to make a change in your life. Some of you feel powerless over the challenges you are facing right now. Some of you feel hopeless about your future!

I’ve got good news for you: It’s not over. Just as it wasn’t over when Jesus died on the cross and was buried, it’s not over for you. Because Jesus took our sins upon Himself on the cross—because God raised Jesus from the dead in victory over sin and death—it is not over.

God is still in the resurrection business and He can change your life!
The resurrection means that no situation is too hopeless!
Jesus Christ offers you forgiveness today.
He promises to cancel your sins and give you the chance to start over!
Faith in the comeback of Christ will result in the comeback of your life!

John 3:16 says:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life!

Do you believe in Him? Romans 10:9 says:

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.