He is risen! As we gather as the church here at Colonial, I invite you to gaze upon the empty tomb with all the astonishment, mystery, and hope that it represents. The hope of every Christian, and all mankind for that matter, hinges upon the ancient testimony that Christ died, and Christ rose again on the third day. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15, “If Christ be not raised, our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”

Over the last 9 years of serving here as the Lead Pastor, I have delivered numerous messages on the empty tomb in which I explored the historical evidence regarding this most unusual and unprecedented claim that Jesus rose again from the dead. I have likely worn you out with the apologetics surrounding the eyewitness accounts, the historical reliability of the four gospels, and why history is full of those who tried to disprove the empty tomb only to become ardent believers in Jesus and the history regarding his life, death, and resurrection. Even this morning, we are providing a free copy of Lee Strobel’s “The Case for Easter” which is the story of one man’s journey from atheism to Jesus-follower based on his investigation of the evidence surrounding the empty tomb.

I am passionate about the subject, no doubt; but, this morning I would like to lead us to consider not so much what happened, or why we can have great confidence that it did happen, but rather what does the resurrection of Christ mean for those who believe? What has been accomplished as a result of the cross and the empty tomb? The question is too large for the mere 30 minutes I have been allowed in this service, so we will focus upon a more specific question: Have we any reason to believe that God is for us?

Our text will begin with the gospel witness of the resurrection in Luke 24:1-7 and then we shall look to the writings of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 8:31-39. Please stand for the reading of God’s Word.

Should you ever wish to explore the most penetrating, hopeful, and theologically rich chapter of the entire Bible, you may wish to meditate upon the 8th chapter of Romans. It is one of my favorite chapters, one that I can read again and again without ever feeling that I have mastered its contents. We shall look only to the last nine verses, but how convenient for our sakes this morning that Paul should write in vs. 31, “What then shall we say to these things?” That is, indeed, the question of the day. What then shall we say to these things that have been declared in the Gospels…what then shall we conclude given the cross and the empty tomb? The angels beg the question when they say to grieving women, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”
He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you…that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day, rise!” But why? To what end?

Paul will answer that question here at the end of Romans 8. Look to what he says first in vs. 31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Friends, do you know that God is for you?

“How can we assume God is for us?” you ask. Look to the pain of the world. Look to the injustice. Look to my handicaps, look to our loss. How could we ever conclude that God is for us? Is God not angry? Is God not silent? Is God not absent in light of such darkness in the world?

Perhaps, you say, ‘there is no God, for how could there be a loving God in light of so much suffering, so much evil, so much darkness upon the land?’ How could Paul come to such a conclusion…that God is there, and that God is for us?

Look to vs. 32, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” Let me ask you a question? Did God give up His only Son for you? Do you know that Jesus Christ came to die in our place? Are you familiar with the gospel…that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world? Have you read Hebrews 2:9 which proclaims that “by the grace of God Jesus was sent to taste death for everyone?” If the answer to that question is “yes,” then can there be any doubt that God is for you? Is there any room left to doubt that He will, along with Christ, graciously give us all things?

“What things?” you ask. For surely we have sought God for a great many things…jobs and spouses and children and supernatural healing. We have asked God for a great many things that don’t seem to come as we have requested.

Friends, shall we bind our convictions regarding God’s sovereignty and goodness to the outcome of a particular request that may or may not be in our best interest given our limited perspective as mere mortals? Should we not develop our theology around those things God has DONE verses those things we desire God to do? Look further to discover what God has done FOR us in vs. 33, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.”

Let me put that another way: If God declares you innocent…if you are justified in His sight; who can bring a charge against you that would render a verdict of guilty? There is no jury above God. There is no court of appeals. If God justifies me, there is no one here, no one on earth, no spiritual power of darkness, that can make any charge against me…the One and only true Judge has already rendered the verdict…I have been justified.

What does it mean to be justified by God? It means that you have been declared RIGHTEOUS in His judgment; He now looks upon you as one who has no sin. “Ahh”…you say, “but I have sinned. If you only knew…if you only
knew the things I have done, you would know that I am anything but righteous. I am unforgivable.”

Dear suffering soul, have you not heard the good news? Look to 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Do you understand that God does not judge those in Christ by their own righteousness, but by the righteousness that was imputed onto us by the one who became sin on our behalf? Consider Colossians 2:13, “You, who were dead in your trespasses…, God made alive together with HIM having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

For those who are in Christ…for those whom He has drawn to Himself…for those whom Paul refers to as God’s elect…there is no longer to be any fear or doubt regarding our final judgment. That judgment has been rendered, and we already stand and will forever stand JUSTIFIED before God because of what Jesus accomplished when He died and rose again on the third day.

“Wait!” you say. “I still feel condemned. I still feel as though I am doomed by my sin. I still feel as though I must earn my way into God’s favor.”

Church, do not trust your feelings: trust the Word of God. Look to what Paul writes next in vs. 34, “Who is it to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

Do you know what we all deserve for our sins against God and others? According to Romans 6:23, we deserve to die. All of us, without exception. That’s a biblical concept, but I think we all pretty much know that to be true, don’t we? If our lives were put up on the large screens for the whole world to view, we would be horrified…we would be discovered…and we all know that the penalty of death would be appropriate given the impossible situation of having acquired so great a debt we can never repay.

Such is why we are all so susceptible to feeling condemned. In the most honest parts of us, we know that we should be. Yet Paul asks the most pointed question: Who is to condemn? Shall the Accuser have the power to condemn us? Shall we have the power to condemn ourselves? Shall our peers, our family members, or our employers have such power to condemn us? Will God yet condemn those of us who are in Christ because of our sin? Will the one who died for our sins turn around and condemn us for those same sins? Do you see the logic of his question?

Listen: you’ve heard of double jeopardy, right? It’s a legal terms referring to the occasion when a person is persecuted twice for the same offense. Double jeopardy is a breach of justice in every decent courtroom throughout the world. Justice demands that there be one payment for an
offense. Once that payment is satisfied, the offender is free to go. It would then be unjust to force payment for that offense again, thus resulting in double jeopardy.

So here’s what Paul is saying: we cannot be condemned for our sin, because the penalty…the debt…the sentence of death that would be required of us…has already been satisfied by the One who died in our place. Thus both the mercy and the justice of God require that we NOT be persecuted for the same offense that has already been paid for by our Substitute.

But wait…there is more. Not only did the Son of God die in our place…not only did He take our debt upon Himself, but by virtue of His resurrection and His ascension to the right hand of the Father, here is what we know: the payment was sufficient and the payment was final!

The great Charles Spurgeon gives this illustration. Consider the young woman who has acquired a great deal of debt. Day after day she languishes under the weight of her debt, until one day, she meets a man of great means. The man looks upon her with unwavering love. Even though she has crippling debts, he decides to marry her. Imagine the hope of the young lady when she realizes that her debt is now shared by her husband. She no longer carries the debt on her own; for now she is loved and cared for by one who has the means to pay her debt. That is good news indeed. But there is yet another level of joy, a state of pure delight, when the husband returns from the creditors with the receipts that show that all of her debts have been paid in full!

This is the picture presented in the Bible regarding Jesus the Bridegroom and His Bride, the church. Jesus so loved sinful people, people like us, that He came to take on our debt, and He then submitted Himself to death on a cross in order to pay the debt that we could never repay. Even more, when Jesus rises from the dead and ascends to the Father, the satisfaction of God’s justice is ACCOMPLISHED. The empty tomb bears witness that our debt has been paid in full…the sacrifice of the Lamb was found acceptable to God…we have been forgiven! As Paul writes in Romans 6:8, “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” The resurrection marks the end of death for those who are in Christ. As Jesus said in John 11, “Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die!”

But wait, there’s more. Not only did Christ die and rise again and ascend to the right hand of the Father, but Paul (along with the writer of Hebrews) helps us to understand that the risen Jesus sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for His church! Just as Jesus prayed for us while He walked the earth as we read in John 17, now Jesus speaks directly to the Father on our behalf as He shares the rule and authority of God, seated in a position of authority over all of the heavens and the earth.
If Christ does not condemn us…if God is the one who declares us to be justified…if the risen and exalted Jesus intercedes for us--then we must return to where we started and agree with Paul’s opening statement: “If God is for us, who can stand against us?”

Church, do you understand how much God loves you? Do you understand what it means that Jesus died and rose again? It means that we can never be separated from the love of God…it means there is hope in this dark world no matter the circumstances. It means that we are free in a way that will take a lifetime to understand and appreciate! As Jesus said in John 8:36, “If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed!”

When Paul was writing his letter to the church in Rome, he had already suffered terrible atrocities due to his faith in Jesus. He was stoned and left for dead, imprisoned, ship-wrecked, beaten, and lied about. And he’s writing to people who understand the costliness of following Jesus into a dark world with this message of hope. He’s writing to people who are already experiencing persecution and hardships. So Paul concludes with these words of encouragement:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Why don’t you add your fear to that list: Shall infertility, cancer, divorce, alienated children, joblessness, foreclosure, depression, physical and mental handicaps, unfaithful friends, male-pattern balding or capital campaigns separate us from the love of Christ?!!!

Look at vss. 37-39. Here’s the answer. Paul writes, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Herein lies the hope of Easter friends. God is for us. If we will yield to Jesus and look to Him as our Savior and Lord, we will never have to fear judgment or condemnation again…ever. What is more, we will know the love of Christ intimately because the very Spirit of Christ will take residence within us, healing, changing and transforming our old selves into something new and beautiful…we will become those who bring glory to God and hope to the world. That is what an empty tomb means for all who believe. That is good news. But I would be remiss if I did not carefully and humbly remind you that we must place our faith in Christ to benefit from the empty tomb. We may not assume God’s mercy and forgiveness without first taking a knee before the Lamb of God. We must call upon the name of Jesus to be saved…as Peter says in Acts 4:12, “There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”
I will close my message with a poem from my dear friend Mildred Abbot who passed on to be with Jesus just a few days ago. She was 96 years old, and in every sense of the word, Mildred was a woman of God. Though faithful to a fault, her husband of many years betrayed her and left her with nothing, including no children or grandchildren. Consequently she spent the last half of her life all but broke, dependent upon family and friends to support her long tenure in the retirement community where she lived. She suffered every conceivable malady and endured excruciating pain and discomfort for decades. And yet, for all the days of her life these past 30 years, Mildred prayed, Mildred ministered to those who were hurting, and Mildred served as a witness to her Lord Jesus Christ. She was beloved by myriads of people from every walk of life and adopted as family by many here at Colonial. In addition to being one of my favorite people on earth, she was one of the most gifted writers I have ever known. She wrote hundreds of poems, but I will share only one with you this morning, it is entitled, “Easter Reflections.” The poem is actually a prayer, which was very often the case with Mildred. So listen now, as this matriarch of our church shares her heart with us one last time:

Almighty God, YOU sent Your SON here to die-
   No man on earth was righteous to qualify.
Jesus came, lived Your way to exemplify
   The rules You’d established for man to live by.

Adam’s offering had failed to identify
   With Holy laws You took pains to specify.
They tortured your Son and tried to vilify
   JESUS, who’d come to save them and testify.

Your “father’s heart” must have ached as YOU stood by
   Watching Jesus’ agonies intensify
YOU saw them take Him away to crucify…
   That day, man’s sin debt, HE died to justify!

Jesus willingly endured to edify
   His Father in heaven, and solidify
His band of followers, and to signify
   His work was finished: YOU, he did glorify!

For though Satan’s power brought man to crucify
   The Holy Son of God, who’d come here to die,
Jesus rose from His grave to electrify…
   Proving Himself Holy God, personified!
O, Lord, I pray I’ll be used to magnify
    Your outreach and call, I want to amplify
By your Spirit’s guidance, I’ll strive to comply.
    Please help me witness, and your NAME sanctify!

Christ is Risen, He is risen indeed. Let’s close in prayer.