

CELEBRATE EASTER 2017
THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Luke 24:1-12

We are going to look at parts of the entire chapter, but we are going to read the first 12 verses to begin.

Luke 24:1-12:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

This morning we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is a part of our faith that's very critical to our understanding of who Christ is and all that Christ accomplishes. When I was younger and would tell people about faith in Christ and how Jesus offers us a new life, I would often try to avoid this specific teaching. The reason is it's pretty fantastic. It's one of the more difficult things to believe upon first hearing. So, I would sometimes direct away from it. Then one day I was reading the book of Acts and I discovered there, "Wow, the early church - this is what they always talked about! They just immediately went to this particular teaching." And I began to see just how critical this is to our understanding of who Jesus is.

In fact, I want to encourage you if you're here and you're new to the things of the bible, or you are unsure where you are in that whole journey, I encourage you to actually begin with this doctrine. Because the reality is: If Jesus was raised from the grave never to die again, everything he said

Celebrate Easter 2017 – The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Luke 24:1-12 | Sunday, April 16, 2017 | By Brian Brookins



about himself is true, to be believed and to be followed. And if it is not true, no matter how helpful his teaching may be in specific areas, it and Jesus and the church are largely irrelevant.

I've listed some resources at the bottom of the worship brochure – just some light reading for you. Some of it is directed toward those who are exploring their faith. Specifically, Tim Keller's book there would be a great place to start if you're new to the things of the faith, and I encourage you to take some time and look at it.

Now, let's just start with the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus. The gospel of John tells us that Jesus performed seven great miracles. He performed many more, the gospel of John tells us, but he tells us about seven. And the climactic miracle was the resurrection of Lazarus. In that passage from John Chapter 11, Jesus is teaching everyone there that he not only gives life, he not only raises the dead, but he is life. He is the resurrection and the life. He doesn't just give the way, give the truth, give the life – he is the way, he is the truth, he is the life.

He is trying to teach his apostles this and he's trying to teach the family of Lazarus this. When he shows up in Bethany, where Lazarus had lived and died, he has this conversation with the two sisters of Lazarus. The first one comes out and he tells her, "I am the resurrection and the life." And the first sister says, "You know, Jesus, if you had been here you could have done something." Jesus teaches: "I am the resurrection and the life." Then she says, "Well, I know in the future." Then Jesus tries to say, "No, no, no -- right now, right here, in this moment, I'm here and I'm life." Then the second sister comes and he has the same conversation, basically, with her. Then he performs this fantastic miracle -- raises Lazarus from the dead after three days.

Well, one of my favorite passages in the gospel of John is the very next chapter, which is John Chapter 12, where they are at a dinner party. The scripture just in passing tells us that the two sisters are there, Jesus is there, and Lazarus is there. I would have loved to have been at that party. And I would have, of course, preferred to sit by Jesus. But if those seats were all taken, I would have been happy to sit by Lazarus. "So, how was your week?" "Good. Wasn't feeling well early in the week. Better now."

What would you have asked?! If you could just for a moment sense, feel the excitement, the momentum that's building in Israel. This is a man who gives sight to the blind, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the leper is cleansed, thousands are fed. He proclaims good news. There is this confidence that is rallying around Jesus, yet here is what's fascinating: People still don't understand

who he is. Even those closest to him are still spiritually blind, and they don't see until this miracle. It is not until the resurrection of Jesus himself that eyes begin to open, and there is a richer understanding: Jesus is the Son of God. He is the life and he is the resurrection.

So, this morning we are going to look at three truths, three observations that we take right from this chapter, right from this text, focusing on the truth that the resurrection opens our eyes. The first one is this - it's found in verses 1 through 6.

1. The resurrection opens our eyes to the meaning of life.

What do we mean? Well, there is a group of ladies that goes to the tomb on Sunday morning. Jesus is crucified on Friday. The Jewish Sabbath takes place. The next day after the Sabbath they go to the tomb and they are grieving. They are mourning. All hope has been lost. That palpable momentum that we are sensing in John Chapter 12 at the healing of Lazarus is now completely gone. Hope is lost. Jesus was the one! He was going to save us. He was going to change everything. He was going to usher in the kingdom and all this oppression was going to be removed. All of that is gone.

All hope is gone, and now in deep mourning they come to the tomb to discover that the body is gone. There are two angels and they ask an interesting question: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" There is still not the understanding of who Jesus is, even from these women who were closest to Jesus. It's not until Jesus appears to them that they begin to understand.

Here is the point. It's an important point. It's obvious to the larger context - something that we might miss in just looking here at Chapter 24. They had put their hope in Jesus, and the moment Jesus died that hope was gone. But when Jesus was raised, it came back with a force that could not be stopped. I want you to see that if the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not true, then we have a real problem when it comes to purpose and meaning in life.

Leo Tolstoy said it like this:

My question - that which at the age of 50 brought me to the verge of suicide - was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man. It was a question without an answer to which one cannot live. It was: "What will come of what I am doing today or tomorrow? What will come of my whole life? Why should I live? Why wish for anything or do

anything?” It can also be expressed thus: “Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?”

Think about yesterday. Think about this past week. What do you remember from the last two weeks of your life? When you die, if that is the end of you, does any of it matter?

It’s interesting -- when we observe human tragedy, when someone is violated, or there is a school shooting, or an act of terrorism, or a child is taken in terrible sickness, you often find -- and it’s completely understandable and probably very healthy -- you often find that those family members will somehow take up the cause. They will give themselves to raising funds to invest for healing, or to stop sex and child trafficking, or to overcome a certain evil that’s related to the loss of that loved one. What are they doing in that moment? Understandably, they are trying to say, “I need the death of my loved one to mean something. I need it to have a purpose. Because if it doesn’t have a purpose, if some good doesn’t come out of this then evil has won.

I believe that the need for purpose in life is unavoidable for us. We can push it down and push it down and suppress it and try to ignore it, but at death it comes up. It’s undeniable at that point.

So, the first revelation, the first eye-opening truth here is that the resurrection opens our eyes to the meaning of life. It offers for us a hope, an explanation. We were made for more than this life and there is a promise of resurrection and life, and that promise now fills today with meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ. You were made for God. You were made to reflect him, his glory, and to live forever in relationship with him.

Observation #2:

2. The resurrection opens our eyes to see our own need.

From the end of verse 6 through verse 8 -- this is the declaration to the ladies. “Remember how Jesus told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise. And they remembered his words...”

Jesus had predicted all of this. If you were here for the Good Friday service, we looked at this briefly on Friday evening. Jesus had told them: “I’m going to be crucified. I’m going to die for the sin of the world.” And now the messengers are making this connection to the ladies -- that the resurrection follows the crucifixion, and it is God’s validation of Christ’s sacrifice.

Celebrate Easter 2017 – The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Luke 24:1-12 | Sunday, April 16, 2017 | By Brian Brookins



Let me explain what I mean by that. Jesus offered himself to pay the debt, the penalty of our sin. For those who are here today and are not frequently in a worship service -- we sing to the Lord to worship him and to unite our hearts together as a church family. Something happens as we sing together. We don't want it to be a performance. We want the worship team and leaders to lead us all to worship God. Our hearts are united, and as we do that, God does something, just pushing his truth down into our souls. Even people like myself who don't sing very well – I get the benefit – and we sound better together than most of us do alone, right? Amen.

You might have been here saying, “Wow, these people -- they stand a lot and they sing a lot. And what is this about the wrath of God? Man, these are some pretty weighty, serious thoughts.” If you just stop for a moment and think how God is infinite and we are worshipping him, should not there be some depth about who he is and what he has done that causes us to think more seriously and to worship him with all of our minds and all of our hearts?”

I would suggest to you that what happens when we sing songs with serious content and we sing them together, that that's a highlight moment. That's the highlight reel of worship for us as the people of God. Well, part of what we are doing there, part of what we celebrate almost every time we gather to worship is an understanding that there is this tension between two Christian doctrines.

1) Mankind, male and female, made in the image of God – glorious, wonderful. There is something spectacular about humanity as the crown of creation, unique amongst all of creation, with the ability to relate to God, to know God, and to steward God's creation for his glory.

Then there is another truth, another doctrine that holds that in serious tension and that is:

2) Something is seriously wrong with our world. Something is not as it should be, and our relationship with God is broken because of sin, and that sin has separated us from God.

We take both truths completely in their whole, seriously, saying, “We don't want an attitude of despising humanity. Every person is worthy of respect. That's what drives basic Christian doctrine about life and the value of life. Despite what you might think, it's not a political party. It's not a political agenda. It's not a craving for any of that. It is the value of human life as made in the image of God, and then fallen and needing redemption. God in his justice will judge our sin. God in his love will take that judgment upon himself that we might be forgiven. Sin paid for; death conquered.

The resurrection opens our eyes to our own need. I love the word picture that C.S. Lewis uses of rats in the cellar. He says none of us wants to think that we have rats in the cellar. We are convinced that there are no critters in the cellar, but the truth is that they are there and they are hiding. If we go in, in the dark, without making a lot of noise, we discover that they're there. He says it's like when we react in a moment, when someone pushes us or offends us, or just in a moment we react without thinking and something comes out that's offensive or angry or short or ill-tempered, we want to tell ourselves: "That's not really who I am. That was provoked. That just came out in the moment."

But Lewis states, "Actually, isn't it true that like rats in the cellar, that's who we are? It's just been hidden. The truth is that what comes out in our most unguarded moments is probably a truer reflection of who we really are than all the time when we are able to suppress it. Maybe that's just true for me. Maybe I'm the only one here with rats in the cellar.

But his point is that sin is not something that we just occasionally do. He is trying to bring out that tension. Mankind is wonderful, beautiful, and sinful. And God is just -- and loving. He judges sin and he takes that judgment upon himself. The resurrection shows us that that judgment was successful. The debt is paid, and life has now conquered death, which was the consequence of sin.

The third and final observation is this:

3. The resurrection opens our eyes to see the love of God.

I've already been making that point, but I want to make it right from the text, and it is this: The first witnesses to the resurrection are a group of women. They show up at the tomb. Luke doesn't give us the whole account, but when we read all the gospels together we discover that Jesus actually appears to one of the women first: Mary Magdalene.

If you are not a believer in Christ or the resurrection, if you've ever thought about it, a typical explanation is something like this. "Well, Jesus was a great teacher. He was a very good person. His followers loved him very, very much. They were deeply moved and disappointed when he died. So after he was gone they would sense that he was with them. They would sense that his spirit was still with them. They might even at times have felt like, 'Boy, he's really here. He's really here with me.' And that began over time to develop into the belief that Jesus was with them. Eventually the gospels were written to provide support for that myth."

The problem with that explanation is that the facts just don't bear it out. They don't support that theory. To begin with, the first New Testament documents were written within 15 years of the resurrection of Christ. 1 Corinthians 15, for example, was written within 15 or 20 years. Paul, in this great chapter teaching on the resurrection, gives a list of people and groups that Jesus appeared to. So if you are making that up, you've got a problem because those people are still alive! You could just go and ask them.

It's contrary to the way myth culturally and historically develops. Worldview changes of this sort develop over a long period of time, but this was an abrupt, radical change of thinking. The Greeks and the Romans didn't want anything to do with a bodily resurrection. They believed that the soul was good and the body was evil. The whole idea was to get free of your body. The Jews believed if there was anything like a resurrection it would be a world-ending event. Even Jesus' very own disciples didn't believe it.

So there is this earth-shattering, instantaneous worldview change. And this is the point of the text (I know - you're saying, "Brian, please get to the point." Alright - here it is). If you were making this up in the first century, you would never choose women. I'm sorry, women, but in that day they just would not be your witnesses. They weren't credible witnesses in that culture. They weren't allowed to testify in court. It's horrible, I know. But let's face it. We are in the 21st century and we are still catching up to this, aren't we? Some of the women are saying, "Yeah! Now he's preaching!"

But you just wouldn't. You wouldn't picture his closest followers back at the clubhouse: "I don't know." The ladies come and they don't believe it when the witness comes and the testimony comes. You want to ask yourself, "Why did God choose for Jesus to first appear to women?" It's amazing, really. Who was Mary Magdalene? She was a follower of Jesus. Do you know what we are told about her in scripture in Luke Chapter 8? She was so oppressed that she was described as having seven demons. And Jesus healed her. Jesus set her free.

Then later, it's interesting -- there is a teaching that Jesus provides us. He says, "You know, if you clean out your life and you don't fill it with God, you are like the person who cleans house. The devil leaves and when he comes back he brings seven demons and the condition of the person is now worse than it was in the first place." Jesus in that passage is teaching that we can't clean ourselves up. We need to fill ourselves with God, right?

But it's interesting. I connect the two texts together because the idea is that seven is the biblical number of fullness. And the story of her life is that she was an extremely troubled person. Undoubtedly, if you had met her, you would have thought, "She's not right." Jesus healed her and she is the first person to give testimony to Jesus. It's the gospel! God loves you! Think about that testimony.

Who is the first person that confesses Jesus and dies and goes to heaven? It's the thief on the cross, right? All of heaven is moving to see who will be the first one after the cross -- and it's a thief! Crucified! Straight from the electric chair to heaven. He confesses Jesus on the cross, has a five minute Christian walk with God, and ends up in heaven for all of eternity. Then Mary Magdalene is the first to see the resurrected Jesus. We see the love of God in this doctrine.

We want to conclude with this. We want to conclude with the way the chapter ends, which is with two promises and our response. The first promise is in verse 36 and following. Jesus appears to his apostles. It is described there. They don't know what to do. They are slow to believe, but the emphasis in the paragraph is this, and here is the promise. The emphasis in the paragraph is that Jesus has a real body, a perfect, resurrected body.

- 1) The first promise is this: a new body in the new heavens and the new earth.

That's the fuller teaching of scripture. Heaven is not a bodiless, matterless experience. The biblical teaching very clearly is: God created matter. God created the universe and it is good. It is marred because of sin, but the physical itself is not evil, and it will be redeemed. That redemption will be sealed at the end of time through the work of Christ, what he accomplished on the cross, and we will live with God with physical bodies in the new heaven and the new earth.

Oftentimes we don't get excited about heaven because we are so locked into our understanding that we are physical, material creatures and we don't think of heaven that way, but that is the way it is described. So, the first promise is a new body in the new heavens and the new earth. Like many of you, I am ready for a new body.

- 2) The second promise is the promise of the Holy Spirit living within you.

The chapter ends with Jesus saying, "I'm going to send the promise of my Father. He is going to clothe you with power, so stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit is given." Biblically we know what happens. Jesus appears to his disciples and to groups over a period of 40 days, then he ascends,

Celebrate Easter 2017 - The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Luke 24:1-12 | Sunday, April 16, 2017 | By Brian Brookins



and then the Holy Spirit ten days later is poured out on the Church. The promise of God is this: If you will trust in Jesus Christ, you will receive promise #1 - a new body in the new heavens and the new earth, and #2 - the Holy Spirit living within you right now.

Our response, sandwiched in between those two promises, Jesus tells his followers: Go and proclaim who I am. Go and tell the world who I am. Proclaim the forgiveness of sin that is found in my name and in my sacrifice so that people might be forgiven and receive these promises.

I went to Atlanta and back yesterday for a funeral. A man who was an elder here for many years, Jerry Warner, passed away last weekend. About five weeks ago Jerry called me and said, "Brian, we've been here now in Atlanta for 15+ years. We love our church. We are very committed. We are very much a part of it. But we want you to come do our funeral." In a few weeks we are going to ordain some new elders here and they said, "Hey, what are the real benefits of being an elder here?" I said, "Well, here's the one benefit: I'll come anywhere in the world to do your funeral when you die if I'm still alive." Then they were like, "Is there anything else?"

So I went to do Jerry's funeral. Five weeks ago he calls me and he says, "Hey, will you come and do it?" I was thinking it was years away. I should have negotiated: "Not on Easter weekend, Jerry, don't pass away." Of course, that was beyond his control. So I went to do the service and I was reminiscing about his life and the gift that he was as he poured out his life in this church.

I was hearing testimonies. There was a young man that married into his family. This was a public testimony. This is nothing scandalous in terms of being secretive. He had gotten his wife pregnant before she was his wife. He was telling me how everyone in the church was praying for him. He went over to my Dad's house one night for dinner and my Mom and Dad led him to salvation in Jesus Christ. Then he told me this. He said, "Brian, since then my Mom has come to faith, my siblings have come to faith -- the whole family has come to believe in Jesus Christ."

I was remembering the story of going to Haiti with Jerry. We went on a little mission plane. It wasn't a commercial airline. It was a private plane operated by this mission agency. When I say it was a rough experience, we actually stopped for gas on the way to Haiti. It's the truth. I'm not making that up. There was a little strip in the ocean. There was a gas station and a hut and about 100 people. The missionaries got out and started handing out tracts. I'm like, "Guys, I think this island has been evangelized."

Celebrate Easter 2017 - The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Luke 24:1-12 | Sunday, April 16, 2017 | By Brian Brookins



When we go to leave Haiti, we pay all of our fees, all of our taxes, we do all our papers. You know, this is not a commercial venture. This is not going through customs at the airport like we're used to. We get ready, we're getting on the plane, we are under this hangar, the plane is right there, and this guy walks up out of nowhere and says, "Okay, there's a \$20 tax before you leave." I'm like, "Tax? We just paid in there." So Jerry comes to me and says, "This is not right. I'm not paying it." You know what I said to Jerry? "Goodbye, Jerry." I'm all about principle, but I'm getting on that plane. Here's my \$20. I'll pay your \$20, but I'm going home to my wife. I want to be home.

I was there with his beautiful family yesterday and we were reminiscing. I want to tell you, we feel such an emptiness at the loss of this great man, but he's home. He is home. There was this sense in that trip of, "Man, this was great. We went for a purpose. We are serving. But this is not home, and I long to get back home." There is a longing in our hearts for relationship with God, for meaning in this life and the promise of something more, and it's found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen? Let's bow our heads.