

We are not having Sunday School classes April 1 so there are no discussion questions this week.

Sermon: ***Resurrection!***

Imagine being around 2,000 years ago when this man Jesus came and you listen to him when he taught. Nobody had ever taught like this. Nobody had ever lived like this. Nobody had ever loved the way he did. So you wanted to become his follower, and you left everything. You left your home, left your family, left your work. People told you that you were crazy but you didn't care because you were convinced that this man got it.

For a while, it was an amazing adventure. Then one Sunday you went into Jerusalem, and everybody wanted to make him king. Things went south really fast. By Friday this man you had given up everything to follow was dead, crucified like a common criminal and you were in deep, deep despair.

On Sunday you go to the tomb because you had nowhere else to go. It's very confusing. The tomb is empty and the stone that had blocked it has been rolled away. The Roman guards who were guarding it are gone and there's an angel and the angel says, "Jesus is not here. He is still alive." So you go and tell everybody this good news. Now that'll probably be dangerous. The Romans will probably kill you for it, but they killed Jesus and he's doing great, so don't worry about that.

Go tell everybody, "Hate is out and love is in, and the crucified carpenter from Nazareth is now Master of the universe. Jesus Christ is risen!" What do you think would be the first words out of your mouth if you heard that on that first Sunday morning? There's a tradition in some churches where somebody will say, "Jesus Christ is risen," and all of the people will respond, "He is risen indeed." That's a beautiful sentiment, but I don't think their response was anything that polished. I think that first Sunday morning when they heard that message, "Jesus Christ, the guy you knew, the man you followed, this carpenter, this rabbi, is raised from the dead..." I think the response was "Wow!" "Wow" is an expression of wonder and awe and being dumbstruck. It's interesting that every language has a word for *wow* and it doesn't have a definition.

Our universe was built on *wow*. There is a theory of creation called the *big bang*. It says in essence that everything we know was contained in something called the *singularity*, smaller than the head of a pin, and then something happened, and within the first second of the big bang, that singularity had exploded into more than 100 billion miles. If, in fact, that is how God created the world then, "Wow!"

Then these other moments come along in history. The Wright brothers get into this machine, and all of a sudden human beings can fly. "Wow!" Then several decades later, a man named Neil Armstrong takes his first step on the moon. "Wow!" Then in 2016 the Chicago Cubs win the World Series, proving that there is a God. That's a *wow* moment.

But it's not just the universe. Your life is filled with *wow* moments like birth and like the first second after you take your last breath. "Wow!" It's called *your resurrection*. "Wow!" but we're here to talk about the great *wow*.

I want to share with you three truths about the resurrection of Jesus. The first one is that *the resurrection actually happened in history*. The second one is *the resurrection changes everything*. The third one is *the resurrection is deeply personal*.

The resurrection really happened.

There's a view of Easter that kind of floats around in the minds of pseudo-intellectuals. It goes something like this: Jesus probably existed. He was probably a really good man, probably a great teacher, probably deeply inspirational, but he was just a man. It's just stuff happening at the natural human level. When he died people

missed him and some folks felt like his spirit was still lingering on, felt this sense of his presence, so that turned into mythic stories about a resurrection, kind of folklore stuff but because in the ancient world people were really naïve, some of them took it literally and they shouldn't have. Stories about resurrection should be understood as just symbolic. They are just mythic stories about the power of hope or how life has a way of reemerging.

This morning I hope you will be able to see that for the New Testament writers, the resurrection did not mean that. It was not understood in that way. There's an Oxford scholar named Richard Bauckham who has written a book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. He talks about how in the ancient world, ancient Rome or ancient Greece, there would be folks who were quite serious about writing about history, what really happened.

They believed to write serious history depended on talking to eyewitnesses who were still alive who had actually experienced, hopefully been participants in, the event, the war, or whatever they were going to write the history of. So history is built on eyewitness testimony by ancient historians who are serious about their craft. We see this in the Gospels. This is the beginning of the gospel of Luke: "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." Whatever you think about this writing, it is not intended to be a symbolic story.

Listen to how Mark is so specific about who was present to witness events he describes: "A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by...and they forced him to carry the cross." – Mark 15:21 Simon was a really common name in ancient Israel, so he wants to distinguish him so he documents "This is the Simon who came from Cyrene." Then to make clear who he is further, he notes that this was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Now why in the world would Mark include "The father of Alexander and Rufus"? Bauckham notes it's precisely because they would have become a part of the Christian community. They were still alive when Mark wrote his gospel. Mark is understood to be the first gospel written and, interestingly, the other gospels don't include these names. Mark was saying, "These guys are still alive, and if you don't believe me, you can ask them and check it out." All four of the Gospels include the names of eyewitnesses who saw the empty tomb and heard the message "Jesus has risen."

In each case, the first eyewitnesses at the empty tomb are women. We hardly notice that fact but this would be very striking in the ancient world, because in the ancient world women were not regarded generally as credible witnesses. In ancient Israel and in ancient Rome, women generally were not allowed to serve as eyewitnesses in a court. They could not legally give testimony in a court, but men could. You see this dynamic at work in this little passage from the gospel of Luke. Luke is writing about the resurrection, and he says, "It was Mary Magdalene..." Notice the names, "...Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this [the resurrection] to the apostles. But they [the men, the apostles] did not believe the women, because their words seemed to [the men] like nonsense." Can you believe there was a time when men were slow to take women seriously?

The women said, "Jesus Christ is risen," and the men said, "Fake news." It wasn't until some of the men actually saw the risen Jesus that they learned to take it seriously. Now here's the point. If the stories of the resurrection were just made-up stories trying to convince gullible people about some higher truth, people would have never made up women as the eyewitnesses of the resurrection and yet in every single gospel it is women who are listed that way. The only reason women are listed as the eyewitnesses is that, in fact, they *were* eyewitnesses. Whatever you may think about these accounts, they are presenting the resurrection as something that really happened. Why? Because of this next truth.

The resurrection changed everything.

To this day date human history by the life of that one man who lived and died and was raised again. Once there was a man named Jesus, and he came and taught like nobody had ever taught, that God is real and God is loving. Not a sparrow can fall from its nest but God doesn't know and care. There was this amazing movement, and then Jesus died, and the movement died with him. On Saturday there was nothing left of that movement and then Sunday it was on! Christianity is quite unique among faiths in this way. It's the only faith that did not develop gradually over time. One day it did not exist and then the next day it *did* exist, and people were ready to die for it, and as a matter of historical fact they *did* die for it.

"So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said." – Matthew 28:8-10 I love how understated Jesus is here. "Greetings." Like, "What did you expect?" *"They came to him, clasped his feet..."* Notice this word. "...and **worshipped** him." Yesterday he was a crucified criminal, a failed messiah. Today he's Lord of the universe, and they worship him.

His way, that way of servanthood and humility and self-sacrifice and love, wasn't thwarted by a cross. In fact, it turned the cross into the most recognizable symbol in human history. That same power that resurrected Jesus can be at work in your life. That's the third great truth.

The resurrection is deeply personal.

The most amazing moment in your life will be the moment after you die. I like that old story about this little kid who comes running out of his bedroom and says to his mother, "Mom, is it true that from dust we are made and to dust we return?" She says, "Yes, why do you ask?" and he says, "I was just looking under my bed, and someone is either coming or going." Somebody is always either coming or going. This moment will come into your life when your life will be over and then something amazing will happen. Either you will see God or, the Bible says, you will face an eternity without God. "Wow!"

God doesn't want anybody to face that, so he says, "I will give you my grace and my love and my forgiveness as a free gift, and I'll be a part of your life every moment that you live, and then you can be with me forever in all of eternity after you die." That one moment after you die, not only will you be celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, you'll be celebrating the resurrection of *you*. "Wow!"

Creation itself is going to be redeemed. Suffering is going to be repealed. Every loss is going to be restored. God himself will wipe every tear from every sorrowing eye. Sickness and sadness and grieving and mourning and weeping will be no more. This moment will come and it will come for one reason – because Jesus Christ is risen. "Wow!"

Maybe you're in a situation where you feel like the hope has gone out of some relationship. Maybe it's with a friend or your marriage feels dead or you've been betrayed by somebody or there's a problem with your children. God wants to fill you with resurrection hope. With the resurrection power of Jesus Christ anything is possible.

If this is you and you've never committed your life to God before, you can do it right now. You just surrender. You just tell him, "God, I confess my sin and I repent, and I ask you to come in and forgive me as a gift of grace and be my leader forever. Right now, this Easter morning, I want to die with Christ, be buried with Christ, and be raised with Christ." So we are inviting you to come and be baptized into Christ this morning and experience resurrection power!