

Easter 4/12/20

Acts 1:1 ESV In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, **2** until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. **3** He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

- I. Today is Easter, or as I prefer, “Resurrection Day”. A secularized culture has tried to seduce our attention, and replace our joy over the most significant event in all human history; making it an orgy of cuteness, candy and a mythical rabbit!
 - A. But this won’t do for true believers! We will fix our gaze on an empty tomb and be filled with praise, knowing that, **1 Corinthians 15:14 ESV** And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain...**17** And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.
 1. Now I’m not a legalist. I always had fun filling Easter baskets and snapping pictures of my kids in their new (uncomfortable) clothes. My point isn’t that its sinful to engage in any secular fun on this day.
 2. But I fear that the pull on Christian families is too weighted toward the meaningless part of Easter and the truth of what happened in a Jerusalem cemetery long ago has been diminished (or lost) to our kids and ourselves.
 - a) Color and hide eggs, and buy enough candy for your kids to keep you in debt to your dentist for decades if you must, but please don’t relegate Jesus’ defeat of death to be just an afterthought to your celebration.
 - b) We must keep the resurrection front and center in our families and our hearts for 365 days a year, not just one. Why is this a struggle for us?
 - B. The common theme of Easter messages is that they are usually apologetic in nature. The discipline of apologetics isn’t about saying “I’m sorry” for anything. It means to lay out reasons for others to believe - to answer their questions.
 1. Every Easter I give reasons to believe in an actual, physical resurrection of Christ from the dead, with the life-altering implications and benefits of doing so. We worship a God who can’t be killed, and has conquered death for us.
 2. The only way to rejoice in Christ’s resurrection is as actual, historical fact; the central fact of all reality, life, truth, spiritual importance, and for all eternity. Nothing is more important for us to believe, and teach our kids to believe.
- II. Could our main problem with keeping the importance of the resurrection at the forefront of our faith and our Easter celebrations be that we don’t **really** believe it? Most of us would say we believe in the resurrection as a fact, like we believe in the War of 1812, or invention of the light bulb; but do we believe in a way that has the power to inspire both hope in us, as well as conviction, drawing us to Christ?
 - A. Jesus wasn’t raised secretly, or only made known to a select few. He was raised with plenty of verifiable evidence. Our text this morning tells of how, “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by **many** proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”
 1. For more than a month, Jesus displayed his resurrected body, offering “many proofs”. The NIV strengthens this phrase, saying Jesus showed

himself alive by “many convincing proofs”; KJV goes even further, saying that Jesus showed himself alive by “many infallible proofs”.

2. I want to briefly examine 3 types of proof that Christ offered (and offers) of his resurrection. My prayer is that these will win your heart like never before.
- B. The first type of proof for Jesus’ resurrection are physical proofs; tangible things that anyone could have seen. If untrue, these would have made Christ’s resurrection easy to dispute by those who would gain by proving it to be false.
 1. The soldier’s had physical proof in the form of an angel who knocked them out cold, and a boulder tossed from the entrance of the tomb. The women, Peter and John saw inside the empty tomb, and saw the mummy-like grave clothes that once enshrouded Christ discarded, and laid off to the side.
 2. But later the gathered disciples even saw and spoke with Jesus, along with the women who served him, and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.
 - a) Jesus allowed them to touch him, feeling his flesh and bones. Thomas touched the nail prints in his hands and where the spear pierced his side. On two occasions, he ate in front of them, proving that he wasn’t a ghost!
 - b) Paul tells us that in all, over 500 people (most of whom were still alive when he was writing) had seen the risen Christ. You might get a handful of people to falsify testimony, but to get 500 people to do so stretches the limits of what is possible for the best of hucksters and manipulators!
- C. This leads to the next type of proof for the resurrection: logical proof. Over 500 people saw Jesus alive. Paul indicates that most of them could still testify to that fact (he wrote this 20 years after the resurrection). If this had been a hoax, don’t you think someone would have broken ranks with them after 20 years?
 1. Chuck Colson was special counsel to President Nixon during Watergate. In the heat of the scandal, he became a committed believer in Jesus. He understood the logical proof of the resurrection very well. He once said...
 2. “I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren’t true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn’t keep a lie for three weeks. You’re telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”
 - a) The disciples were commanded by the Jewish authorities not to preach that Jesus had risen under threat of beatings, imprisonment and even death. But they kept preaching because they had seen something that they couldn’t “unsee”; a man, whom they had seen die, alive and well!
 - b) They eventually began to make waves in the Roman empire. Peter kept preaching until he was crucified upside-down; Paul kept going until Nero had him beheaded. Others kept preaching no matter what the cost.
 3. It strains logic to believe that generation after generation of reasonable men and women would march headlong to death for a fable, a fairy tale, or a lie.
- III. But the most important proof of Jesus’ resurrection wasn’t physical or logical. It was spiritual. I don’t mean that it was wispy Neverland kind of belief. I mean that there was something supernatural that transpired to convince those who saw him.

- A. It occurred to me as I was preparing this message that after Jesus' resurrection, not a single person recognized him until Jesus revealed who he was. Look with me at each gospel's account to see what I'm talking about...
1. In Matthew, the women receive news of the resurrection from the angel, but run off obeying the angel's command with "great joy" and "fear". What was the fear about? Could it be that they were afraid the good news wasn't really true? But Jesus shows up as they are running off to tell the disciples, simply says "hi" to them, and they grab onto his feet and worship him.
 2. In Mark, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, but when she goes and tells the disciples that Jesus is alive, they don't believe her.
 3. Luke says that the men thought the women were telling them an "idle tale". Peter runs to the tomb, but just gazes in, eventually returning home marveling, and not knowing what to make of it all. Luke also gives us the story of the two downcast disciples on the road to Emmaus, who, though they meet Jesus on the road, can't recognize him. When he finally appears to the disciples later in the story, they think they are seeing a ghost!
 4. In John, Mary (who has spent much time with Jesus) sees him at the tomb and thinks he is the gardener. Thomas doesn't believe he's alive until he sees him, and touches the wounds in his hands and side. The other disciples saw him on the sea shore while they were fishing but didn't recognize him.
- B. But for Mary at the tomb, everything changed when Jesus spoke her name. For the men on the road, it was when Jesus gave thanks and broke the bread. After touching Jesus, Thomas worshipped him as Lord and God. The disciples in the boat knew him when they heard his voice. These people hadn't forgotten Jesus' face or his voice in so short a time. Something supernatural was happening.
1. A preacher can give you the whole list of reasons to believe in the resurrection. He can make the necessary logical arguments to help you believe, but if Jesus doesn't reveal himself as alive to you, it is all for nothing.
 - a) In Matthew, when Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives to ascend to his Father, it says **Matthew 28:17 ESV** "And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted." How is that possible? We can assume that all of the people gathered on the mountain knew Jesus, and they were looking right at him! Why then the doubt?
 - b) Could it be that Jesus had revealed himself as alive to those who worshipped, while those who doubted were scratching their heads, trying to figure out how this could be, or if it was even true, because Jesus, in his sovereignty had not revealed himself to them?
 2. **John 6:63a ESV** It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. You cannot discover God's truth by human intellect (no matter the evidence). God must reveal what is truth to you for it to profit you at all. John the Baptist said "A person cannot receive **even one thing** unless it is given him from heaven." (John 3:27) It is spiritual proof of the risen Christ that we need.
- C. You may wonder, how can the risen Christ reveal himself to me since he ascended to the Father over 2,000 years ago? A moment ago, I mentioned Chuck Colson. When working for Nixon, Colson was not a religious man by any estimation. He was known in the press as Nixon's "hatchet man" and the "evil

genius' of an evil administration.” When Watergate started to heat up, he was working with his lawyers to avoid prosecution and jail time.

1. But in 1973, a close friend gave him C.S. Lewis’ “Mere Christianity”. As he read Lewis’ chapter on pride, he was consumed by conviction for his proud, arrogant, sinful heart and saw clearly his need of a Savior. In his car, he wept aloud, and surrendered his life and future to Jesus Christ.
 2. When the press found out about his conversion, he was mocked as a fraud. It was reported that religion was his strategy to get the courts to go easy.
 - a) But the nation was shocked when a reborn Chuck Colson changed his legal strategy and pled guilty to all he had done wrong, though it cost him 7 months in a federal prison. His conscience now demanded it.
 - b) What had happened to make the “hatchet man” a holy man? The risen Christ had been revealed to him and he could never go back and deny what he had seen. Chuck Colson left politics and went on to found Prison Fellowship, an international ministry to prisoners. He preached to the forgotten men and women behind bars until until his death in 2012.
- D. Jesus had revealed himself to Colson and he was never the same. Search your heart. Is the resurrection a religious assumption to you, a fact that you’ve filed away because someone told you it was true, or has Christ met you in the garden, calling you by name? Has he extended his hands and side to you that you might experience his wounds by faith? When we break the bread around the table, do you see him like the disciples at Emmaus? Has he revealed himself to you in a way that makes it utterly impossible for you to turn back now?
1. If not, make your your highest priority to seek him out! Go like Mary to the tomb and say, “Where have you laid him?” Insist like Thomas to see him and touch him! Like Peter, jump out of whatever boat you find yourself in this morning and swim as fast as you can to him!
 2. That is what faith looks like! **Jeremiah 29:13 ESV** You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. If you run to him, he will reveal himself to you! Make seeking him your highest priority. You won’t be denied.
- IV. **Benediction: 2 Peter 3:18 ESV** (May you) grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.