

Easter 2014 Why Does It Matter?

This has been a busy week with surgeries and folks in the hospital and with the memorial service for Jeanetta Jones Saturday and with our Good Friday service. I was trying to get all of the sermons figured out and praying about this message this morning. It's simple, right? Talk about the resurrection. That's what we do on Easter.

As I thought and prayed, I kept seeing John Sims. He became the face of Christ for me this week. So emaciated by the cancer, I could picture Jesus looking like John as he hung upon the cross. I began to ask myself, "what difference does this make?" For the average guy sitting at home this morning eating his cereal, why does it matter that some Jewish guy died 2,000 years ago and supposedly rose from the dead. What difference does it make to me today?

Sitting with John Sims and his son Michael, and Mike Dewey Friday morning I said, "this is why the resurrection of Jesus matters. This is where it has to matter. Because if it isn't true, if Jesus isn't raised to life, then this is all a bitter joke. This is unbearable." Easter matters! The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ matters. Why? Let me give you a couple of reasons this morning as we celebrate his resurrection together.

Turn to Luke 24. The scripture declares, **"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."**

Luke 24:1-8

He is alive. Risen from the dead. Why does it matter? First of all, **His resurrection means everything He said is true!** Think with me for just a moment about the claims Christ made about himself. They were remarkable. Extravagant. He set himself apart from every other human being, and yet did it in such a way that when we read the gospels, we almost miss it. John Stott writes about this in his book *Why I Am A Christian*. He writes of Jesus, "By claiming to be

the good shepherd who went out into the desert to seek his lost sheep, he was implying that the world was lost, that he wasn't, and that he could seek and save it. In other words, he put himself in a moral category in which he was alone. Everybody else was in darkness; he was the light of the world. Everybody else was hungry; he was the bread of life. Everybody else was thirsty; he could quench their thirst. Everybody else was sinful; he could forgive their sins. Indeed, on two separate occasions he did so, and both times observers were scandalized. They asked, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'" (Mark 2:5-7; Luke 7:48-49).....Several of his parables implied that he expected to return at the end of history. On that day, he said, he would sit on his glorious throne. All nations would stand before him, and he would separate them from one another as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats. In other words, he would settle their eternal destiny. Thus he made himself the central figure on the day of judgment. [Think about it.] These are breathtaking claims. [Realize] Jesus was by trade a carpenter. Nazareth was an obscure village on the edge of the Roman Empire. Nobody outside Palestine would even have heard of Nazareth. Yet here he was, claiming to be the savior and the judge of all humankind." **"He claimed to be the Christ of Scripture, the Son of God and the savior and judge of the world." ...John Stott**

Fantastic. Outrageous. I don't have time this morning to share all the reasons I believe his claims to be true except for this one fact. The one who made all of these claims; the one who said he could forgive my sins; the one who said he had come that I might have life and have it more abundantly; the one who said he had come to give his life as a ransom for my sins; the one who said he was the resurrection and the life and even if I died, if I believed in him, I would live; the one that made those claims was crucified, died, was buried, and on the third day he rose from the dead! Did you hear what I said? Talk about making a point. He rose from the dead! Listen, when a man is dead from Friday until Sunday and then gets up and walks out of the tomb, alive, seen by eye witnesses, by 500 people at one time, I'm going to pay attention to what that man has to say.

I know, your philosophy professor said it was all a hoax and there were no eye witnesses to verify his death or his resurrection. Well, the Roman centurion verified his death to Pilate. He would not risk lying to Pilate (Mark 15:45). Mark tells us the names of the women who were at the cross and saw him die (Mark 15:40) and then mentions them again as the women who came

to the tomb and found the stone rolled away and an angel that told them Jesus was risen from the dead! This wasn't my brother's wife's sister in law's cousin that talked to a guy that saw the risen Lord. Mark gives us names. To his readers he is saying, "go ask them if you don't believe me."

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, "**For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, *most of whom are still living...***" 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 Paul wasn't making up some new Christian theology, he was telling what he knew. Eye witnesses were still alive and telling the story.

His resurrection means everything he said is the truth. He really is the way, the truth and the life. He rose from the dead. In his words, He laid down his life and he took it up again. That means he really is the only way to the father, the only way to heaven. The Bible says that God made it clear that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. "**...who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.**" Romans 1:4. The resurrection means everything he said is the truth.

Why does Jesus' resurrection matter? **His resurrection means the Father accepted His atoning sacrifice for our sins.** We have been forgiven. But how do we know for sure? The book of Hebrews teaches us that Christ became our High Priest and offered himself as the sacrifice that would save us from our sins. Remember last Sunday we talked about Hebrews 9 that tells us Jesus entered heaven, into the very presence of God, and offered his own blood as the sacrifice that atoned for all of our sins. Hebrews 9:14 says Jesus offered himself as the unblemished sacrifice to God. By his death upon the cross he has taken away our sins. But how do we know the Father accepted the sacrifice? By this fact: God raised Jesus from the dead! Romans 4:25 says, "**He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.**" It might be better translated "**Jesus was put to death because we had transgressed and he was raised because we were justified.**" Romans 4:25 Jesus' resurrection from the dead is God's declaration that he has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins.

Listen to James Montgomery Boice: “When Jesus was on earth he claimed that he would atone for our sin. ‘The Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mt. 20:28). In time the hour of his crucifixion came and Jesus died. The sacrifice was offered, the atonement made. But how were human beings to know that it was acceptable? Suppose that Jesus himself had sinned, even while hanging on the cross. In that case the Lamb would not have been without spot or blemish, and the atonement would not have been perfect. Will God accept the sacrifice? For three days the question remains unanswered. Then the moment of the resurrection comes. The hand of God reaches down into the cold Judean tomb, and the body of Christ is quickened. He rises. The stone is rolled away. Jesus is exalted to the right hand of the Father. By these acts we know that God has accepted the perfect sacrifice of his Son for sin.”

R.A.Torrey wrote, **“I look at the cross of Christ and I know that atonement has been made for my sins; I look at the open sepulcher and the risen and ascended Lord, and I know the atonement has been accepted. There no longer remains a single sin on me, no matter how many or how great my sins may have been.” . . . R. A. Torrey**

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead lets me know that the Father has accepted his atoning sacrifice and my sins, though they are many, have all been forgiven.

Why does Jesus’ death and resurrection matter? **The resurrection means death has been defeated and eternal life is available to all who will repent and believe.** Jesus told Mary and Martha that he was the resurrection and the life and that if we believed upon him, even if we died, we would live. If we are united with Christ by placing our faith in him as our Savior and Lord, then we are both united with him in his death, so we die to our sins, and we are united with him in his resurrection, so we are raised to new life in him as well.

Paul wrote **“For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” 1 Thess.4:14.** Those who have fallen asleep is Paul’s way of referring to the dead. “The believer in Christ is united to Christ by faith in such a manner that if Jesus rose from the dead, the believer must be raised also.”

His resurrection matters because if he isn’t raised from the dead, then no one is. We are all out of luck and this life is all there is. If Jesus wasn’t resurrected then there is no such thing as resurrection from the dead.

Paul said, **“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...”** 1 Cor. 15:13-20.

If Christ is not raised from the dead then there is no resurrection for any of us. This life is all there is. But if Christ is raised from the dead then we can have perfect confidence that our death is just a door way to his promise of eternal life. For us to die is now gain, for when we die and depart this life we will be present with the Lord.

Why does the resurrection of Jesus matter? **Jesus’ resurrection means we have been delivered from the fear of death.** The writer of Hebrews said of Jesus, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** Hebrews 2:14-15

Death lost its’ terror on Easter Sunday morning. Not Christ but sin and death was defeated at the cross. Samuel Gandy wrote, **“He hell, in hell, laid low; Made sin, He sin overthrew; Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so; and death, by dying, slew.”** ...Samuel Gandy

Death no longer holds us in its grip for Christ is raised triumphant. Death can’t frighten a child of God. The Scripture declares through Christ and his resurrection “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” Because of his resurrection, Paul declares the day is coming when we will sing “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” 1 Cor. 15:55.

To all that have repented of your sins and believed upon Christ as your savior and Lord, death has lost it’s permanent grip. You have no cause for fear. Yes we sorrow the loss of our loved ones. We miss them while we are yet here, but that’s only for a while. Eternity with Jesus, alive and in his presence, and with all that have gone on before us in Christ, that’s what is

waiting on the people of God. Hallelujah!

Does the resurrection of Jesus matter? I say it does. “Yes, but you are a Christian. You’re a preacher. You’re supposed to say that. What does it matter to me? I’m not a Christian so what difference does it make to me?” I’m glad you asked. One more thing the resurrection of Jesus assures us of: **The resurrection of Jesus means there will be a day of final judgment.** The Bible says “[God] commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:31.

This is telling us that Jesus has been appointed the judge of all the earth and the proof of this is that God raised him from the dead. Death isn’t the end of things. There is judgment for all who have refused God’s salvation in Jesus Christ. One day you will stand before God and give an account. “Well, I’ve been pretty good.” But you need to understand you will be judged - not by your own standard or by society’s standard of what is good. You will be judged by the standard of Jesus Christ, God’s perfect, sinless Son. “Pretty good” won’t measure up to his perfect and holy standard. All of us have sinned. All of us fall short of his standard so on that day of judgment, without Christ as your Savior, you are without hope and will be condemned and sent to hell. There is only one hope and that is to repent of your sins and make Jesus Christ your Savior and the Lord of your life. He suffered and died and then rose again for you. He did all of this for you, so you could be saved. The cross was all about you, so you could have hope and could have eternal life!

The choice is yours today. The resurrection shouts to us this morning. He was telling the truth. He was everything he claimed to be. He was and is the only way and the truth and the life. God did accept his sacrifice. The resurrection verifies that. And if you will call upon him today, you can be saved and have eternal life. You can experience that resurrection power as Jesus comes into your heart and life and gives you a brand new life. What a perfect day for a resurrection to occur in your life. He is risen. He is risen indeed! And because he lives, you can live also. The choice is yours to make.

One last thing. The resurrection of Jesus means all things are possible. The Bible says “if the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, that same Spirit will quicken your mortal body.” The same resurrection power is at work in you to enable you to conquer sin, to walk in obedience, to be healed in your body. If God can raise Jesus from the dead then He can do anything! The resurrection means all things are possible!