

Eyewitness to Easter: Jesus

Our journey looking at the lives of the eyewitnesses to Easter has brought us to this glorious morning. We heard the story as Sarah read from the gospel. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! I can think of no greater words than these. Christ is risen and when we trust in him, we have hope, we are saved, we have life! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

We called this Eyewitness to Easter. So far in this series we've looked at the stories of Peter, Mary Magdalene, Judas, John, Pilate, the Women, and Barabbas. We found these people at various places and times in the last week of Jesus. Some witnessed his triumphal entry, some were at the Last Supper, others witnessed his betrayal in the garden, some were at the trial by the Sanhedrin and at Pilate's judgement seat, some witnessed his crucifixion and some were at the empty tomb on Easter morning. Not all of the witnesses made it to Easter.

Judas missed it, taking his own life before Jesus' death and resurrection. Pilate heard the tomb was empty and was left to wonder what it meant. There were other witnesses we don't think about. Consider the two thieves dying next to Jesus. One mocked, the other asked Jesus to remember him and found forgiveness and pardon. Jesus assured him "today, you will be with me in paradise." Remember the Roman soldier who stood at the cross watching and listening as Jesus died. Mark tells us **"with a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last...And when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God.'"** Mark 15:36

In case anyone is unconvinced that Jesus really died, John tells us when the Roman soldier came to Jesus to break his legs in order to hasten his death, he found Jesus was already dead. To make absolutely certain of death, the soldier took a spear and pierced Jesus' side "bringing a sudden flow of blood and water." John then wrote, referring to himself, **"The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth and he testifies so that you also may believe."** John 19:35.

Eyewitnesses watched as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus from the cross, washed and prepared his body for burial, wrapping fresh linen cloth around his body with 75 lbs of dry spices carefully inserted between the folds of the linen. While some of the women who had followed Jesus watched, Joseph and Nicodemus placed his body into the rock tomb, rolled a stone in place and sealed the tomb. Home by sundown as the Sabbath began, they all waited through the silence and sadness of Saturday with the women returning early

Sunday morning to add additional spices and instead they found the stone rolled away, the tomb empty and the announcement of the angels, “He is not here, he is risen!”

Eyewitnesses to Easter. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus whose hearts burned within them and whose eyes were opened when the risen Christ broke bread, blessed it and handed it to them. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, then to James the Lord’s brother, and last of all to Paul himself. All of these saw more than an empty tomb, they saw the risen Lord. They were eyewitnesses. But there is another eyewitness, one whose testimony we can certainly believe and that is Jesus himself. Jesus is the ultimate eyewitness to Easter. What did Jesus see from his unique vantage point?

Jesus saw death conquered by his death and resurrection. No one knows exactly what went on inside that tomb. If we had been watching, would we have seen Jesus suddenly begin to breathe, open his eyes and then begin struggling to free himself from the linen grave clothes? No. That would have been a resuscitation. No this was something new, something that had never happened before in the history of the world. Jesus had raised people from the dead but this was something more. Those Jesus raised from the dead would die again but not Jesus. He died and rose again, conquering death by his death. The risen Jesus tells John, **“I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” Revelation 1:18** He holds the keys to death. Although death still brings heartache and loss, we live in hope because through Jesus and his resurrection, the graves will give up their dead and we will live and reign with him forever! This was something more than resurrection. This was victory. This was triumph over death. John Chrysostom said, “Let no one fear death, for the Savior’s death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of death has annihilated it.”

Jesus’ resurrection is what the bible calls the firstfruits, the first of what will be for all who have believed and trusted in Christ for salvation. Paul explains the body that is buried is perishable but through Christ’s victory, the body raised is imperishable, buried in weakness but through Christ, raised in power, buried in dishonor but through Him, raised in glory, buried a natural body but raised a spiritual body. Paul writes, **“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” 1 Corinthians 15:20** Jesus is the first of this new order and all those who believe in Him, we too will experience this glorious resurrection with a new body, raised imperishable, raised in glory like Jesus. The bible says **“So**

shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” 1 Cor. 15:49 Jesus saw what would be through his victory.

What else did Jesus see as an eyewitness? **Jesus saw the faithfulness of the Father!** In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked the Father if possible, to take this cup from him, to find another way. But then Jesus said, “nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.” Jesus bowed to the will and plan of the Father because he knew he could trust him. He knew he was faithful. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter quotes from Psalm 16. He said David was writing prophetically about Jesus. It’s as if Jesus was saying, **“I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.” Acts 2:25-28**

Jesus knew he could trust his heavenly Father. He knew he would not abandon him, his body would not see decay. Even from the cross when Jesus felt overwhelmed by the weight of the sins of the world which he bore, even when he felt abandoned and hopeless, when he cried out **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Mark 15:34** even then he knew His Father would be faithful. Notice even then he said “MY God.” He knew the Father would receive the sacrifice of his life and his love on our behalf and raise him to life. He knew that not even death could separate him from the love of the Father, finally saying “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Jesus saw the faithfulness of the Father. May the same be true for all of us today. Trust in your Heavenly Father’s love and faithfulness. God so loved the world, you, that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him would not perish but would have eternal life. He hasn’t abandoned you. He sent his son to make a way for you to come home to the Father, to find the “path of life” and to “fill you with joy in his presence.” Jesus witnessed the faithfulness of his heavenly Father.

What else did Jesus see? **Jesus saw the transformation of his disciples.** When Judas betrayed Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples scattered and ran. While Jesus is falsely accused by the Jewish council at the house of Caiphias, Peter denies even knowing Jesus, three times. As Jesus hangs on the cross, dying in agony, the gospels indicate the only one of the twelve disciples present is John. After Jesus’ crucifixion and burial, the disciples gather behind locked doors, frightened they might be the next victims of Pilate and the High Priest. It’s not

been the best week for the disciples, hardly stellar leadership from any of them. Jesus had told them repeatedly that he would be crucified and after three days he would rise again, but none of them understood, none of them could grasp it. Now they are gathered in fear, in sorrow, in disbelief when John tells us, **“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” John 20:19-20** Luke gives us some additional detail about the response of the disciples. When Jesus said “Peace be with you”, Luke writes, **“They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’...And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence.” Luke 24:37-43**

Over the next 40 days Jesus met with the disciples at various times and places, convincing them that he was in fact, alive. The resurrection of Jesus transformed the disciples. It convinced them he was indeed who he said he was – not only the Messiah of Israel but the Son of the Living God and the Savior of the world (It even convinced his ½ brothers). The resurrection of Jesus convinced them his words were absolutely true. His resurrection emboldened them to proclaim his death and resurrection without fear, without compromise, regardless of the cost. The resurrection is what motivated them to go and tell because the resurrection is what convinced them. They couldn’t deny what they had seen and witnessed with their own eyes! When they were threatened and told to stop preaching in his name and testifying to his resurrection, they told the authorities **“We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead...God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things...” Acts 5:29-31** Again and again in the book of Acts the disciples declare that Jesus was put to death on the cross but “God raised him from the dead!” The resurrection was central to the gospel message.

Jesus saw the transformation of the disciples. Frightened and hiding after the crucifixion, but after the resurrection and then the baptism in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, they were never

the same. No money, no weapons, no influence, but they had the unwavering conviction that Jesus died and rose again and would give forgiveness and eternal life to all who believed in him! With that knowledge, that conviction, they fulfilled Jesus' commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel. They turned the world upside down as they proclaimed the good news of the risen Savior.

Jesus, the ultimate eyewitness of Easter, what did he see? **Jesus saw the completion of it all.** From the cross Jesus said, "It is finished." What was finished? Redemption's plan. The sacrifice that secured salvation for all who would turn to him was complete. The defeat of Satan. The opening of the door to eternal life in Christ. He looked ahead and saw death swallowed up in victory. He looked ahead and saw men and women from every tribe and nation and people in heaven, rejoicing forever in God's presence having overcome by his blood! And you know what that means? Maybe that's the best news of all for us on this Easter Sunday morning. What did our ultimate Eyewitness of Easter see?

Jesus saw you and me! From the cross he saw us, broken, beaten down by life and the consequences of our own sins, lost, defeated, perishing without hope. He saw us and that's why he went to the cross, to bear the penalty for our sin, to bear our guilt. Jesus said this was the reason he came into the world, to give himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. From the cross he saw us and he willingly bore our sins in his own body. But from the empty tomb he saw us filled with hope, redeemed, sins forgiven. He saw us with a new start, in Him resurrected to a new life, a new beginning! The question is, do you, will you, believe? The bible says **"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved....for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."** Romans 10:9-13

Do you believe in your heart that Jesus died for you, that he took your place on the cross, that he bore your sins and the penalty for your sins in his own body, and that God raised him from the dead? If you do, then ask him to forgive you. Repent, tell him you are sorry for your sins and ask him to save you and give you new life in him. If you will do that, He will save you. You can trust the faithfulness of God to forgive you just as Jesus trusted the faithfulness of the Father to raise him from the dead.

Jesus saw you and he saw me. In his great love and mercy, He died for us, while we were still sinners, living in rebellion against him. What extraordinary love. How about it? Isn't it time you came to Jesus? Are you ready to turn to him?

I think every year for the past several years, somewhere in the Easter message, I have read this passage. This year shouldn't be any different. St. John Chrysostom in his 4th century Easter homily declared, **“Let no one weep for his iniquities, for pardon has shown forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior’s death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of death has annihilated it. By descending into hell, Christ made hell captive...and so now we sing the triumphant hymn: O Death, where is your sting? O hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen and hell is overthrown. Christ is risen and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life reigns. Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the grave.”** ...St. John Chrysostom Christ is Victor. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.