

The sermon

Intro

Why does an event that happened almost 2,000 years ago have meaning today?

- 1) Because of who it was that died and rose again.
- 2) Because the resurrection furnishes proof that his words were true.

Body

Passage Focus

We'll look at eyewitness accounts of the resurrection. We'll do this in four scenes, reading each scene step by step. Then we'll draw six life-changing truths from these accounts.

Scene 1: Jesus is missing (20:1-10)

READ 20:1-10

"the first day of the week" means Sunday. *"still dark"* means early in the morning. Jesus was crucified at 9am Friday morning (Mark 15:25) and died at 3pm that day (Mark 15:34-37).

Mary was going to the tomb to anoint Jesus' dead body with spices (Mark 16:1), to mask the stench and respect Jesus' body.

She found the stone moved. Jesus's tomb was sealed with a large rolling stone. A disc-shaped stone kind of like one of our rolling tables in the gym, but thicker and much heavier.

Mary assumes ***"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*** She's thinking grave robbers or the body was moved by grounds-keepers.

Alarmed she leaves running and tells Peter and John (*"the other disciple"*). They race to the tomb. John bends over (*"stooping"*) and sees the linen cloths that wrapped Jesus (19:40), but he doesn't see the body. There's also a neatly folded up facecloth. Not the work of robbers in a rush to get in and out.

John believes. Jesus is risen. But they didn't grasp the fact that the Old Testament foretold the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Peter and John leave for home.

Thoughts

Mary didn't grasp what had happened. She expected to find a dead corpse to anoint. She didn't expect to find a risen Jesus. Even though Jesus had promised repeatedly that he would be rejected by the religious authorities and killed and raised on the 3rd day (Matt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). Jesus said these things plainly. His disciples were slow to understand.

Scene 2: Jesus appears (20:11-18)

Mary returns to the tomb. This time she looks inside. There she finds two angels who, apparently, weren't there before. They question why she's weeping. Now isn't the time for weeping. Jesus has risen! It's time for joyous celebration!

She's not disturbed by the angels because she's still troubled by the missing body: ***"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."***

At this point the risen Jesus appears, but she doesn't know it's him. Mary assumes Jesus to be a gardener who might know Jesus' whereabouts. Jesus calls her by name and now she knows. She recognizes that voice. It's Jesus.

Ascension

Why does Jesus encourage Mary to let go?

- 1) Mary can let go because He hasn't ascended = she'll see Jesus in person again. He'll be around for a while.
- 2) Now isn't the time for clinging. It's time to tell others the good news.

Mary obeyed, telling them ***"I have seen the Lord."***

Thoughts

Mary Magdalene is significant. She sees Jesus die. She sees Jesus buried. She sees Jesus risen. This is eyewitness testimony. Matthew was written about 30 years after the resurrection. One could look her or her relatives up to confirm.

What we have here is eyewitness accounts. How else would we expect to know these events without eyewitness accounts? God has chosen to preserve eyewitness accounts of Jesus' words, works, death, and resurrection in written form so that we could believe today.

Scene 3: Jesus removes any doubt (20:19-23)

Still Sunday. Now it's night time.

The disciples are gathered behind locked doors. There's fear that the Jewish authorities who sentenced Jesus to death will go after his followers. It's time to celebrate, but threats remain.

Jesus appears and says, ***"Peace be with you,"*** and proceeds to show them his crucifixion wounds that remain in his resurrected body. They're convinced. They believe.

Jesus makes it clear he's risen as promised. He leaves no room for doubt or mystery. He wants us to be certain too. That's why eyewitness accounts have been preserved in our Bibles.

Jesus' body

Some think of Jesus as a phantom. How did he get through the locked doors? He must have walked through the walls. He must be spirit only, not body.

Not so fast. He let them touch him = physical body. Luke's account of this event reveals he ate fish with them (Luke 24:36-43). In the Last Supper Jesus talks about drinking wine with them in the still to come kingdom of God (Matt 26:29). Jesus retained a physical body.

Jesus got through the locked doors by passing through them (changing his elements) or teleporting.

Scene 4: Jesus provides proof (20:24-29)

The apostle Thomas wasn't present when Jesus appeared to the rest. Thomas wasn't convinced by their testimony.

"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Eight days later Jesus appears, saying to Thomas, ***“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it at my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”*** Proof required. Proof provided.

Thomas responds, ***“My Lord and my God!”*** Thomas is convinced. This is very noteworthy! Jesus is God. Jesus doesn't correct Thomas because Jesus agrees.

This reaffirms what was said at the beginning of John's gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. – John 1:1

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14

The Word is Jesus meaning Jesus is God. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4). There's one God who created all that is and he's eternally existed in three persons. In Jesus Christ, God himself truly suffered in our place.

Truth 1: A promise-keeping Savior

In rising from the dead, Jesus is keeping his word.

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” – John 10:17-18

Jesus told his disciples on multiple occasions that he would be rejected, killed, and live again. He also said he would raise himself.

My point is if Jesus can reveal the future, and if Jesus can rise from the dead, shouldn't we have confidence he can keep his promises?

The fact that Jesus has authority over death (he's God) means you can bank on each of the truths I'm about to share.

Truth 2: A Proof-giving Savior (20:30-31)

Being God, Jesus is everywhere and he sees everything we do, he hears every conversation, he knows everything we're thinking and don't say out loud. So he saw what Thomas said to the disciples. Did you notice how Jesus tells Thomas to touch those wounds that Thomas said he needed to see?

Did you notice that Jesus didn't scold Thomas for his demands? Jesus simply provides the proof demanded. Jesus is okay with questions. Jesus is okay with confusion. Jesus is okay with misunderstanding. Jesus is okay when we think the good news of Jesus dying in the place of sinners and rising from the dead and forgiving sins and a future kingdom where death and sin and suffering are done away with forever are too good to be true. They're true. And they're better than our wildest expectations. Better than any manmade fairytale.

Jesus is okay with questions. What Jesus isn't okay with is defiance (rejecting the answers we find) and pride (thinking we're wiser than God, thinking our desires are more important than God). Jesus isn't okay with people looking for reasons not to believe. This wasn't Thomas. He wasn't looking to find an excuse to sin. It was just that the resurrection was so fantastic it was hard to believe.

Do you have questions? I'm open for conversation. Ask the church people sitting around you. Search for answers in the Bible. Receive what you find!

READ 20:30-31

Only a portion of Jesus' miracles (and words) are recorded in John's gospel. Why was John's gospel written? To convince you to believe that Jesus is God the Son incarnate. So you'll have life in Jesus.

Resurrection proofs

1. Of all the religious gurus in history, only Jesus confirms his words.

Jesus confirmed his claims with miracles and the resurrection. No other religion can say here's a proof that justifies the claims in our book. No other religion has a credible basis for believing its claims!

Interestingly, Jewish writings after the crucifixion and resurrection conceded that Jesus was a miracle worker when they say he "practiced sorcery" (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a, 21). This agrees with the gospel accounts where the Pharisees attributed Jesus' ability to cast out demons to demonic powers (Matt 12:24).

2. The missing body

All the Jewish authorities needed to do to kill Christianity from the beginning was produce Jesus' body. They couldn't. Note also that the armed and combat-trained Roman guards were under the threat of death if they failed to guard the body.

3. If the resurrection didn't happen, the apostles would have died for something they knew to be a hoax.

Assuming the body was stolen, why would disciples subject themselves to persecution, and even death, for something they knew to be false? Early believers were executed for their faith. People don't die for claims they know to be hoaxes. No disciple gave up the "hoax" when threatened with death.

Yes, terrorists today die for their faith. But their faith is based on secondhand eyewitness accounts. Which in reality are deceptive lies. The apostles are different. They were willing to die for what they actually saw with their own eyes.

Truth 3: A Life-giving Savior

John speaks of having "*life in [Jesus'] name.*" What sort of life?

One aspect of this life is future. Elsewhere John writes:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." – **Revelation 21:1-4***

That's a world free from death and pain which means a world free from cancer and chronic pain and sin and war and terrorists and identity theft and unpunished crimes and inflation and grief over self-inflicted consequences and fighting with the sinful and selfish cravings of our own hearts.

In the kingdom to come, God will put an end to all of this.

Truth 4: A Spirit-giving Savior

The other aspect of life is a new heart today.

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ *Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. – John 7:38-39*

That's help from the outside (God) that comes inside of us (Holy Spirit). This is what Christians call being born again. Where God reshapes our beliefs and desires and goals and responses to our circumstances.

Hate for fellow humans is transformed into compassion and affection and prayer and care and patience. God sets us free from the patterns that bring ruin into lives. This is life today!

Truth 5: A peace-giving Savior

One aspect of the Holy Spirit's work is producing peace in our hearts. Three times Jesus says, "*Peace be with you.*" What sort of peace?

Well it's not the absence of conflict or the absence of pain or the absence of hard circumstances. It's peace in the middle of distressing conditions.

On Thursday evening Jesus had said:

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." – **John 16:33**

Peace isn't the absence of tribulation. Peace is inner calm, absence of turmoil, a soul at rest when there's reason to be troubled. Peace is supernatural comfort wrought by God. Peace that doesn't come and go with our circumstances. Something we can't muster up on our own. Something that doesn't make sense given our circumstances.

There were reasons the disciples had their doors locked. Peace was still available.

One way the Holy Spirit brings peace is perspective. Peace comes when we remember Jesus' victory on the cross in securing our forgiveness, his victory to come in the new heavens and new earth, peace follows.

Peace flows in us when we pray (casting our cares on God), when we ponder God's word, and when we practice God's commands = obedience (Phil 4:6-9).

Truth 6: A mission-giving Savior

"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." Here there's a transition from believing Jesus because you've seen him in person to believing in Jesus because you've heard the eyewitness testimony of his disciples. That's us. We believe from eyewitness testimony in the Bible.

Jesus sends us into the world to speak the truth, calling men and women to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus for forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

How might we do this? A good start is asking someone if anyone's ever shared the Christian gospel with them. If they say no, ask them if you can share it. If they say yes, ask them if they understood it. What was the gospel exactly?

Non-Christians

In case you're with us this morning and wondering why Christians want to talk to you about Jesus, it's because Jesus sent us. We believe Jesus created us. We believe in his death and resurrection, we believe in forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and we think everything Jesus says about how to do life is right and we'll flourish if we heed his commands. And we've experienced a new heart with new desires and God's supernatural peace.

The gospel is this. Adam broke God's command and we inherited a sinful nature. So we break God's commands and willingly place ourselves under God's judgment. God is wholeheartedly opposed to sin so he can't just sweep it under the rug. That's why there's a final judgment called hell. This is a good thing by the way. If God didn't care about theft and lying and cruel words and rape he wouldn't be very good would he?

Yes God is wholeheartedly opposed to sin and we rightly deserve God's punishment. But God's merciful. And for God to be both just and merciful, our sins need to be punished. So he sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross in the place of sinners.

Every sin you've ever committed will be punished. You'll either suffer the punishment in hell. Or you'll trust Jesus in which case Jesus took the punishment for you.

Jesus promised life. Maybe you're asking how do I get this life?

If you haven't believed, turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Embrace Jesus as Savior from sin and Lord to follow. You'll receive complete forgiveness and you'll be heirs of the eternal kingdom to come.